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ABSTRACT

This resource guide is intended to assist schools in developing protocols for responding to critical incidents. It focuses on proactive plans to deal with the traumatic aftereffects of a critical incident which affects some or all of the members of a school community. The guide outlines a generic protocol which includes steps to be undertaken in response to a critical incident and includes materials to help school staff understand and carry out their support functions after a crisis. Information is provided on factors that make an event a critical incident, planning for dealing with emergencies, and setting up response teams. Steps for establishing a critical incident response plan are described and include: (1) gathering the facts; (2) contacting the school district; (3) activating the school team; (4) communicating with staff; (5) setting up counseling centers; (6) talking with students; (7) informing parents; (8) providing funeral information; (9) conducting a team review; and (10) planning remembrance activities. Appendices include information on establishing counseling drop-in centers, guidelines for a grief support group, critical incident stress debriefing, understanding and coping with grief, alternate programs, suicide warning signs and ways to help, and material for parents following a critical incident. A list of related resources is provided. (CR)

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RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

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A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

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1998

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RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS:
A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

Tragic events, such as the sudden death or suicide of a member of a school community, can result in intense feelings of anxiety, guilt or anger in students and staff. Schools must make plans in advance for interventions which can be activated in order to reduce the negative impact of critical incidents on the school community.

Helping students and staff deal with their grief reactions will reduce the likelihood that one critical incident will lead to further unfortunate events. Some members of the school community may experience fear, preoccupation with death or suicidal thoughts in response to the death of a person in the school community. Some students react with absenteeism or inappropriate, acting out behaviour. A pre-planned protocol for supporting students and staff can be effective in reducing psychological, physical and social difficulties. The main purpose in providing support to staff and students is to empower them and their families to help themselves and to enhance their skills for future critical incidents in their lives.

FACTORS THAT MAKE AN EVENT A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Schools and school districts often deal with sudden, unexpected incidents which have the potential to adversely affect the students, staff and community. Sudden deaths or serious injuries due to accidents, illnesses, violence or abuse can have a significant affect on a school population. Suicide by a member of the school community can have a devastating effect on a school. Other traumatic events such as fires, flooding or other threats to the school or community can have an impact on staff and students. Any incident which has a negative impact on the school and interrupts the normal flow of daily events can be considered a critical incident.

Critical incidents can create strong emotional responses in both students and staff. Symptoms of the impact may vary with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. In this emotion-charged climate following a critical incident, the existence of well-established plans for dealing with the situation can reduce confusion and ensure that decisions are reasoned and thorough.

- Established plans which outline guidelines for providing support can speed up responses when timing is critical.
- Schools must take steps to ensure that one critical incident does not lead to further crisis reactions in the school community or create harmful conflict among school personnel who are trying to make decisions under stress.
- The district and school are subject to close scrutiny based on their response to a crisis. Children and their families should be reassured by the school's actions that the incident is being competently managed.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE GUIDE

This resource guide is intended to assist schools in developing protocols for responding to critical incidents. It focuses on proactive plans to deal with the traumatic aftereffects of a critical incident which affect some or all members of a school community.

The guide outlines a generic protocol which includes steps to be undertaken in response to a critical incident and includes materials to help school staff understand and carry out their support functions after a crisis. The Minstry of Education does not set standards for critical incident responses in schools. School Boards are responsible for setting their own standards for the schools in each district. It is hoped that this resource guide will be helpful in planning. The protocols and services suggested in the resource guide can serve as goals which might need to be weighed against resources available in the district.

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The importance of a planned response

When a critical incident occurs, there is little time for reflective and inclusive decision making. Just as schools have plans for fire drills and earthquake procedures, schools should also develop generic plans for responding to other types of crisis events. Emergency procedures need to be practised by staff and students, just as fire drills are practised, to ensure that school staffs are ready to deal effectively with a critical incident.

Before a crisis situation occurs

Planning should include readiness to deal with emergencies and a plan for responding to the traumatic after effects of a critical incident. Planning should include:

- identification of members of Critical Incidents Teams at school and district levels,
- protocol for the effective management of emergency situations,
- development of district and school plans to handle the traumatic after effects of a crisis,
- provision of training for handling both emergencies and responses to critical incidents, and
- scheduled reviews of critical incidents plans as needed.

Critical incidents affecting a school community include not only those crises that occur during the school day and on school property. Incidents that occur on school property after hours or away from school property, such as on a field trip or at a sporting event, may also require immediate response from school authorities. All schools should have plans in place for handling emergency situations as they are happening.

Emergency planning and critical incident response protocols should be designed to deal with many different types of crisis situations, for example:

- Weapon
- Serious injury, assault or murder
- Intruder - during or after hours
- Kidnapping or hostage taking
- Suicide or sudden death
- Acute illness emergency
- Bus or other vehicle accident
- Child abuse in the school
- Bomb threat
- Chemical spill
- Natural disaster (utility failure, flood, tornado, earthquake)

Safety of the students and staff should be the number one consideration in developing emergency procedures. Other key issues to be considered in the planning include:

- how to assess the severity of the situation,
- the method to be used to call for assistance,
- procedures for defusing, controlling the crisis and accessing further help,
- the role of experts and when to hand over the incident to outside experts (police, mental health professionals, etc.), and
- debriefing by the Critical Incidence Response Team to decide what further action to take and whether response plans should be mobilized.

After a critical incident

Once the safety of the staff and students is assured, the protocol for responding after a critical incident can take effect, if needed.

District officials should be notified as soon as possible when a critical incident has occurred anywhere in the district. District resources should be easily activated to assist schools, if requested. The district level crisis team should ensure that all resources to support a school are mobilized and additional support from other sources such as health or social workers is obtained for the school if needed. School level crisis teams should be freed from their regular roles and responsibilities temporarily so that they can carry out the plans and respond quickly and efficiently to the needs of students and staff.

Both school and district critical incidence response teams should monitor the situation carefully and continue to provide assistance to students and staff. The effects of some tragic events have long lasting results for some members of the school community. Both students and staff who are affected may need help finding appropriate support services for the long term.

It is essential to review the handling of a critical incident and follow up with recommendations for improvements to the plan. With each use of a critical incident protocol, the people involved discover ways to refine and improve the plan.

The nature of a critical incident may create an occasion in which the school community comes face to face with serious social issues, such as spousal abuse, racism, or discrimination based on sexual orientation. Although the topics related to the incident may be sensitive in the community, it is important for the school to honestly validate the issue's connection to the incident as it helps the school community to deal with the critical incident. The follow up plans may call for the planning of awareness training, around celebrating diversity or eliminating harassment, in the school or district.

Legal considerations

As part of the planning of school and district responses to critical incidents, issues of records management and privacy need to be understood. Planners should consult with the district's information and privacy administrator and the Board's lawyer to ensure that plans are consistent with the requirements of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA). The requirements of FOIPPA apply only to written records and not to oral communications. However, any written records based on an oral communication, such as a handout, is subject to the requirements of the act. See page 42 for more information on FOIPPA.

Schools are also cautioned that the provisions of the Young Offenders Act (YOA) apply to any report which contains information about an alleged offence committed by a young offender. See page 43 for more information.

RESPONSE TEAMS

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Setting up response teams

Experience in school districts has shown there is a need for critical incident response teams at two levels: district and school. In some cases school districts and community resources, such as mental health services, have collaborated on the establishment of a community level crisis team. This district level organization can assist schools in handling serious critical incidents as needed. The School Team is intended to assist the school administration in managing the response to a critical incident at the school level.

The district critical incident response team

The District Team is often led by the superintendent or assistant superintendent. Since the person responsible for this team may need to represent the Board of School Trustees and make quick, difficult decisions on behalf of the Board, it is important that it be someone with the necessary authority. Specialized school district personnel as well as community professionals and people representing community services may also play key roles on the District Team.

Membership of a District Team often includes:

- Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent
- Director of Special Programs or Special Education Services
- School psychologist or person responsible for supervising counselling
- Mental health personnel, Ministry for Children and Families
- District staff as needed (Aboriginal Education Coordinator, Alternate Program Coordinator, etc.)
- Other community-based professionals as needed.

One of the initial responsibilities of the District Critical Incident Response Team is to develop a protocol for the district. Once the plans are in place, the team's role is to ensure that all members are familiar with the protocol and clear about their duties should there be a need to act.

The District Team can provide several different types of support to the schools, for example:

- assisting in developing school level teams and reviewing school-based plans,
- supporting training for school level teams,
- collaborating with the principal and school critical incident team to determine whether other district or community agency help is required,
- providing links to established community agencies such as mental health services, victim services, police, or community-based critical incident teams,
- managing media inquiries and handling communication issues with the community at large,
- contacting the other schools in the district that might have students or

staff that could be affected by the critical incident,

- developing a contact list of people and agencies which is current and accessible to all schools in an emergency,
- working out of the school which has experienced a critical incident, if needed, and/or
- arranging for stress debriefing for staff in the school.

Following a critical incident, the District Team can assist the School Team in reviewing and improving the school plan. They can communicate information about how the protocol operated to other schools in the district thereby providing links between schools and ensuring that all school teams in the district benefit from what has been learned by the school that has applied its protocol.

The School Critical Incident Response Team

Each school should have its own team to handle critical incident responses. Members of the team should be chosen based on their leadership roles in the school or their personal qualities which would make them an asset in a crisis situation. These individuals must be willing and able to assist the school administration in carrying out the critical incident plan. Membership of a school critical incident response team may include the following:

- Principal,
- Counsellors,
- Department heads or other key teacher leaders, and
- Other staff (teacher Assistant, child care worker, multicultural worker, clerical staff, etc.)

Like the District Team, the first task of the School Team should be to develop the school plan or protocol. In most cases this will be based on procedures set at the district level. The District Team may provide a framework for the schools to use, or schools may use this document to begin their planning. It is important that training be provided to the School Team so that each person is familiar with the entire plan, confident in what their role is, and has developed the skills necessary to carry out the plan.

Once the plan is developed, a copy should be submitted to the District Team at the beginning of each school year. It is important that this plan include a list of the names, roles and after hours contact telephone numbers of all School Team members. Clear communication is essential so that the teams can be mobilized quickly in the event of an incident.

At the school level, two copies of the plan should be distributed to each staff member: one to be kept at home and the other at school. School staffs should also have an opportunity to discuss the plan with the School Team at a staff meeting or in-service session. Topics might include procedural matters and the dynamics of grief and trauma reactions. School counsellors will often be a source of expertise in carrying out the training. Materials that might be used for training sessions are included in the appendices of this resource guide.

A printed handbook or pamphlet on the school's critical incident response protocol should be available to each staff member and parent. Parents should

be informed about the plan and translated materials should be available when appropriate and feasible. Examination of existing critical incident or sudden death protocol resources from across British Columbia and other locations shows that they contain some common features:

- Introductory material describing the importance of effective critical incident response procedures and planning.
- Clear, easy to follow steps in an action plan for the principal and team to use as a guide for action following a critical incident.
- Delineation of the roles and responsibilities for individuals in the school community in carrying out the plan.
- Strategies for providing counselling for both students and staff.
- Plans for identifying individuals at risk after a crisis.
- Alternative procedures for off site programs, if needed.
- Support materials such as sample formats for class meetings, staff meetings, communications with parents, information about grief and stress reactions, and a list of individuals and agencies with contact phone numbers so the School Team can readily obtain assistance in a hurry.

Choosing a Response Team

Critical Incident Response Team members should demonstrate the following skills and characteristics:

- compassion, friendliness and approachability,
- leadership and decision making ability,
- ability to follow through with decisions,
- availability and flexibility (off hours),
- effective listening skills,
- respect for confidentiality, and
- clarity about the way to take care of oneself during and after a crisis.

Adapted from Crisis Response Manual, *with the permission of School District 71 (Comox Valley).*

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Considerations in developing a critical incidents response plan

Developing a Critical Incidents Response Plan is the first task the team needs to take on in order to be prepared for responding after a traumatic event. There are many things to consider in the process of developing the plan, from practical questions of telephone lists to the very difficult tasks of diplomacy and ensuring sensitivity to the emotional needs of those affected. While each school community is different and has unique needs, it is worth taking a moment to consider the following areas of concern when developing a plan.

Cultural diversity

Given the diversity that exists in school and the community, staff members will need to give consideration to developing plans whose strategies are flexible to meet this diversity. These strategies will need to be appropriate for individuals and groups who may respond differently than staff would expect from their own cultural perspective. There are some important ideas to consider when developing and implementing a critical incidents response plan in a school with cultural diversity:

- Individuals and groups from diverse cultural backgrounds may respond differently to stress situations,
- Services employed to respond to a critical incident may need to go outside the school or district to community support staff who possess additional language skills, and
- Beliefs around concepts of religions, death, and the grieving process differ amongst cultures.

Individuals at risk

Some individuals in the school community are particularly at risk following a critical incident. Children or adults who have a close relationship with a person who dies suddenly will be vulnerable and may need support. Staff or students who have recently suffered a personal loss may be strongly affected by a death or other crisis affecting the school. Children who have emotional or behavioural disorders are particularly sensitive to the turmoil of emotions and changes in routine that take place following a critical incident. District and school protocols for managing a crisis should include plans to deal with the needs of such individuals at risk.

Students who are already at risk for suicide, especially those who have made previous suicide attempts, will be at an increased risk in the aftermath of a crisis situation, particularly if the critical incident is a student suicide. Appropriate plans and responses will decrease the likelihood of imitation, sometimes referred to as "copy cat suicides." Staff and students who are close to a person who commits suicide will usually feel both anger and guilt that they were unable to prevent the death. They may require reassurance and assistance in understanding their own feelings and help finding counselling.

Young people may feel isolated and alone with their pain after a loss or tragedy. The school must respond with support to assure students that they are not alone, that their feelings and responses are normal, and that help is available. Advance planning can assist school staff members in recognizing students who need help dealing with a crisis. Critical incident training can provide school staff with the skills to initiate effective action.

Vulnerable students

Some students are more vulnerable following exposure to a critical incident because of their circumstances. Students with special needs, students from minority cultural backgrounds, students who have English as a second language, and students on Visas who may lack parental guidance while residing in Canada, illustrate a just a few circumstances that may warrant extra attention. For example, students with behaviour disorders and frequently accompanying low self esteem may react disproportionately to a crisis or trauma, even if the event does not directly affect them. Students who have difficulties such as poor communication skills or intellectual disabilities may need additional support to understand and deal with the incident. Some students are disturbed by changes in their normal routine and the response to a critical incident may even further disturb their coping ability.

Some students are more susceptible to depression, self-destructive behaviours, and at greater risk for suicide. This may be due, in part, to the fact that they have difficulty understanding and expressing their feelings or because they suffer from feelings of isolation. Critical Incident Teams should take particular care in planning support for these individual students. Parents may need to be involved in planning for some children; for example, the plan might include a student being removed temporarily from the school environment. Whenever possible, however, the Team should implement school-based interventions for most students.

School staff may be surprised at their own responses to a tragedy in the school. Staff who are close to the deceased or directly affected by the traumatic event may require extra support

Staff needs

School staff may be surprised at their own responses to a tragedy in the school community. Staff who are close to the deceased or directly affected by the traumatic event may require extra support to carry out their roles in the school plan. Some may experience anxiety or sadness that seem out of proportion to their relationship to the person involved in the critical incident. This can be due in part to the existence of unresolved losses. All staff should be kept well informed and given an opportunity to discuss their own feelings. The nature of the critical incident and the level of personal involvement in helping students to cope may bring up issues in their own lives which require counselling support.

Because critical incidents can be traumatic, the normal coping mechanisms of even experienced teachers and other staff members can break down. Adults can feel severe distress symptoms which make it difficult for them to work effectively. Staff may need help in dealing with this stress. Even if they believe that they are coping well with the crisis, staff may feel symptoms of stress such as fatigue, upset stomach, headaches, chest pains, poor concentration, numbing, a feeling of being overwhelmed, or other reactions.

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District protocols for critical incidents should include plans for providing

stress debriefing for staff. Even if staff or administrators do not initially see the need for stress debriefing, research indicates that employees who have experienced traumatic events say that this process is crucial for the well being of the staff. Facilitators carrying out the debriefing should have training in Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. The district protocol should include plans for obtaining formal training for staff in the district who can carry out staff debriefing sessions. See Appendix 3, Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, on page 56 of this Resource Guide.

School Critical Incident Response Plan

The following generic school critical incident protocol has been adapted from resources around the province and from other provinces. This material is designed as a template for districts to use when developing school handbooks or as a resource to compare with existing critical incident response protocols when they are under review.

This protocol example features ten steps. Because many school critical incidents involve sudden deaths of people in the school community, the language in the steps is oriented toward responding to such events. They can be adapted for use with any type of traumatic event affecting a school.

Throughout the protocol steps, this template uses the word Principal to refer to Principal or designate.

Step 1 - Gathering the Facts

1. Principal confirms the critical incident with appropriate sources of reliable information:
   - immediate family,
   - police,
   - coroner,
   - school district personnel, and/or
   - community resource personnel such as a mental health worker.
2. Principal collects information on the critical incident, including:
   - verification of the details,
   - identification of individuals involved, and/or
   - evaluation of the emotional status of school and, if necessary, respond to the immediate safety needs of students and staff.
3. Principal consults with the families affected to determine their wishes concerning public announcements and information for school staff and students.

Step 2 - Contact with the District

1. Principal telephones the designated District Critical Incident Response Team leader. If the leader is unavailable, the Principal contacts another member of the District Team who in turn will call the other members of the District Team.
2. Ensure that the predetermined media contact person for the district is informed. This person handles all media requests for information and arranges for the preparation of press releases if necessary. The decision of the family about privacy of information must be respected and possible legal implications related to privacy issues must be considered.

Our Source

Response Protocol and accompanying material is adapted from *School Critical Incident Response Protocol* with the permission of School District 37, (Delta). Delta acknowledges four other school districts for their contributions to the work on that document: School District 43 (Coquitlam), School District 35 (Langley), School District 36 (Surrey), and School District 39 (Vancouver).

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3. The District Team leader arranges for all involved schools and personnel to be informed by telephone. The timing of these calls should be sensitive to the needs of the school community most affected by the incident.

Step 3 - Activate the School Team

1. The Principal contacts the members of the School Team and calls them together for a meeting. The School Team will implement an appropriate plan of action that takes into consideration both the wishes of the family or families and the needs of the school.

   A sample meeting agenda for use at a School Team meeting is provided on page 50 of this resource guide. In brief, at this initial meeting the team should:

   - Distribute the Critical Response Team Checklist (sample on page 49).
   - Determine what needs to be done.
   - Clarify each person's tasks.
   - Ensure that confidentiality is maintained until information is shared with the whole staff and clarify family privacy issues.

2. The School Team notifies the rest of the staff including secretarial, janitorial and other support staff of a special staff meeting. If the critical incident occurred during an evening or weekend, a scripted telephone tree message can be used to call staff to a meeting before the next school day. The School Team should not discuss the incident on the telephone unless it is already widely known in the community. Care should be taken about using the phone tree:

   - Ensure that each person understands the message about the staff meeting by asking them to repeat the message back to the caller,
   - Avoid leaving a message on an answering machine/voice mail or with a child, and
   - Reassign telephoning responsibility for people who may be most affected by the incident.

3. Tasks for the School Team before the start of the school day, if possible:

   - Determine further details of the event.
   - Ensure that the predetermined media contact person is provided with detailed information necessary to effectively carry out the role.
   - Determine the family's wishes regarding personal property if the incident has been a sudden death or suicide and ensure that personal property is secure. For example, replace the lock on the individual's locker if the incident has been a student death or injury.
   - Decide what course of action will be used to deal with potential "shrines" created by classmates of the deceased after a student death. It is important to establish a protocol on this matter. Allowing a "shrine" in one instance, but not in the next, may raise questions of fairness and favouritism that can escalate emotions and introduce conflict unnecessarily.

- Assess whether teachers-on-call will be needed and advise the appropriate person to contact them.
- Identify members of the school community that may be most affected by the incident and plan support for these people.
- Assess need for additional counselling support in the school and ask the District Team to assist in making the necessary arrangements.
- Plan a meeting to inform staff. See page 51 for a sample staff meeting agenda.
- Prepare a written statement for the staff meeting.
- Decide whether a letter will go home with students informing parents of the critical incident.

4. Tasks for the Team during the school day:
   - Supply a brief, written statement for office staff to use in referring incoming queries or media calls. A script helps to ensure that callers are redirected to the official media contact person.
   - Contact other nearby schools such as feeder schools which may be affected and ensure that District Team has accurate information so that they can inform all schools in the district.
   - Activate plans for drop-in counselling centres and assign counsellors and other staff as appropriate.
   - Contact required outside resource people as appropriate, for example: mental health services, police liaison officer, Regional Operating Officer (area manager of the Ministry for Children and Families), and/or public health nurses.
   - Bring in additional support staff if needed with the help of the District Team.
   - Lower the flag when appropriate. This is a potentially contentious issue, particularly in the case of a suicide, which needs to be discussed by the staff as part of the advance planning for a critical incident.
   - Prepare the letter to parents if one is needed. See pages 38 and 39 of this resource guide for sample letters.
   - Implement planning for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing for staff for the end of the school day, if possible. See Appendix 3 on page 59 for material on Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.

> Remember to contact other schools, such as feeder schools, that may also be affected...

Step 4 - Communication with Staff

1. Inform all staff of the critical incident at an emergency staff meeting prior to the start of school, if possible. In addition to teachers, be sure to inform secretaries, custodians, teacher assistants, itinerant staff such as therapists, cafeteria staff, bus drivers, public health nurse and playground supervisors of the meeting. See page 51 for sample agenda. After the meeting, inform all staff who were unable to attend the meeting.
2. Carefully orchestrate the staff meeting in order to assure staff that the team's plans are in place. All members of the School Critical Incident

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Response Team should attend. Include the following in the meeting:

- Advise staff to deal with students to a level of their comfort.
- Reassure staff that they will be supported in their efforts to give comfort to students and that additional help is available to anyone who needs it, staff or students.
- Remind staff of items in their critical incident handbook which may be useful over the next few days and provide them with written directions for the day as soon as possible during or after the meeting.
- Introduce any people from the District Team or the community support staff who are in attendance at the meeting and may be present in the school providing support to staff or students.

3. Develop a plan for the day with the staff:
   - Maintain a regular school schedule, if possible.
   - Cancel special activities, if necessary.
   - Carefully state the information which should be given to students during class discussion and provide all staff with additional copies of agendas for class discussions to use with students.
   - Inform the staff of the counselling services that are available to staff, students and parents. In the case of a sudden death or suicide, consider assigning a counsellor to visit the scheduled classes of the deceased.
   - Identify students who are closest friends or relatives of the deceased or injured and make plans to inform them with additional sensitivity and support.
   - Identify students at risk, those who are vulnerable to stress or changes in routines, and make specific plans for each student. This task can be assigned to a key staff member such as a counsellor, special education teacher or child care worker.
   - Ensure that staff members who are absent get information. Make plans to assist on-call teachers with classroom discussions.
   - Plan for informing students who are absent. In the case of students who might be at risk, telephone their parents immediately.
4. Additional staff meetings may be needed:
   - Keep staff informed throughout the day by calling short update meetings during breaks.
   - Gather information about student and staff needs throughout the day.
   - Provide all staff with information about plans for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.

STEP 5 - SET UP COUNSELLING CENTRES

Plans for the designation of counselling centres in case of a critical incident should be in place as part of the protocol development. When a traumatic event occurs, there is not sufficient time to carefully discuss how this service will be organized. Specific rooms or areas of the school can be designated for

dealing with a potentially large number of people who are grieving or experiencing high levels of stress following a critical incident.

Some ideas suggested by schools who have planned and used this type of service following a school critical incident include:

- Individual students can take a break during the day to visit the counselling centre to get support in dealing with their emotional reactions to the death or traumatic incident.
- It is important that support be available to students, at the moment they need it, in a private and supportive setting.
- Small group counselling sessions may be helpful if personnel assigned to the centres have experience and training in counselling.
- Staff in the centres should have written information to give to students, such as normal stages of grief and guidelines for how to arrange for support from mental health workers.
- Large groups of students should not be allowed to congregate in the centre.
- Schools should consider calling on elementary and secondary counsellors from neighbouring schools, when possible, to augment available counselling personnel.

Give information on the critical incident in a low-key and factual manner

Suggestions for setting up counselling centres and grief groups are included in the Appendices 1 and 2 on pages 53 and 55 of this resource guide.

Step 6 - Talk with students

1. Be sure there is a teacher in each classroom as the students come in for the day or the first period class.
2. Give information on the critical incident in a low-key and factual manner, including:
   - what happened,
   - when and where the events occurred,
   - who was there at the time of the incident,
   - what happened after the event,
   - who might be seriously affected by the incident because of their relationship with people directly affected by the traumatic event, and
   - what is going to happen next. In the case of a sudden death, try to have information available on the funeral arrangements.
3. Give the students the opportunity to react, discuss, and ask questions. See page 31 for a suggested format for class discussion following a critical incident.
   - Allow time for the students to express their feelings. Keep in mind that reaction times may vary.
   - Give students permission to express what they uniquely feel. Listen and be empathetic.

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- Consider using activities to help students process their grief, such as art, poetry or creative journal writing.

4. Once the talk seems to be over, begin the regular class routines with flexibility to respond to more questions throughout the day.

Teachers will need to be prepared to hear some unusual questions and to handle these questions in a matter-of-fact manner. They will need to model, by their behaviour, that the critical incident is serious while at the same time show warmth and understanding for all students. Teachers should watch carefully for individual students who are having a hard time coping to ensure they get access to help in the counselling centres. It is better to over-refer than under-refer. Teachers should not try to second guess the level of grief of a student or staff member, as people respond to trauma and grieve differently.

Following a critical incident, a child may report other traumatic events in their lives such as child abuse. All staff should be clear on the protocol for reporting child abuse and neglect and be prepared to take action to get help for the student in areas which may seem unrelated to the current trauma situation. For information on child abuse and negelect, all BC Schools have a copy of "The BC Handbook for Action on Child abuse and Neglect, 1998."

STEP 7 - INFORMING PARENTS

Send a letter home with the students to inform parents of the incident, if appropriate. Sample letter formats, provided on pages 38 and 39, can be adapted for use following a critical incident. In general, parents who are well informed are better equipped to support their children at home.

Information shared in such a letter should be carefully worded to ensure that personal and family privacy is respected. As this letter is a written record, disclosure of personal information is covered by FOIPPA. Personal information should only be disclosed to the extend that it is permitted under FOIPPA. See page 42 for more information.

STEP 8 - FUNERAL INFORMATION

In the case of a death, inform staff and students of plans for funeral arrangements. Many types of critical incidents involve sudden deaths: accidents, suicides, natural or physical disasters, or sudden acute health events. The school will need to provide information to the whole school community about formal occasions such as funerals or memorial services.

- When appropriate, students and staff should have the opportunity to attend the funeral. To do this, the School Team should arrange permission from district level administration to dismiss students.
- Decisions about allowing funeral attendance should be governed by the wishes of the family. Student and staff attendance at the funeral can provide support for the family if that is the family's choice. Students should be informed of the family's wishes regarding attendance at the funeral service.
- The funeral service can help peers understand and accept the death of a

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friend or colleague and can help to provide closure.

- Ensure that students who plan to attend the funeral are prepared by helping them anticipate what happens at funerals. Explain the purpose of various rituals, appropriate etiquette at the ceremony, and other topics as necessary, such as embalming, cremation, open caskets, burial and specific cultural practices.

Step 9 - Team review

After each use of the Critical Incident Protocol the School Team should meet to review the events while they are still recent, preferably within two weeks. This will serve several purposes: improve the plans, raise staff skills about the use of the protocol, and tie up loose ends and concerns following the critical incident. The meeting should include:

- a review of how well the protocol guided the actions of staff. Identify improvements that can be made in the school plan for future situations.
- re-evaluation of how well the actions taken as part of the plan were carried out. Appropriate changes can be made for next time, including additional training, if needed.
- ensuring that counselling for School Team members is available for staff who feel that they still need to deal with their own feelings about their role in the critical incident.
- a plan to write letters of appreciation to all who helped.

Following a critical incident a child may report other traumatic events in their lives such as child abuse. Staff should be familiar with protocol for reporting child abuse and neglect.

Step 10 - Remembrance activity

Family wishes should guide planning of a remembrance activity after a critical incident which involved a student or staff death.

- Schools and districts are cautioned against holding a large assembly to honour the deceased because of the potential for group hysteria and for glorifying death in the case of a suicide. Large assemblies are not recommended for acute grief situations.
- Students or staff may wish to express their grief and sympathy by contributing something in the name(s) of the deceased: a scholarship fund, school landscaping, a school plaque, books for the library, construction of a showcase, or some other appropriate means. Caution should be taken when establishing a permanent or highly visible memorial to remember a student who completed suicide.
- Staff may need to provide leadership to students wishing to establish an appropriate remembrance, as judgment of peers may be impaired following a traumatic event.

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COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

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Announcement to the Student Body

The manner in which a critical incident is announced to the students can have a major impact on the emotional responses of the whole school community. Before making the announcement of a traumatic event, such as an accident or sudden death, which is not already widely known in the school or community, the principal should consider some important issues:

- Ensuring that the families' right to privacy is respected.
- Making the announcement simultaneously so that all students in the building will hear about it at the same time.
- Reducing potential for creating a highly charged emotional climate by informing students in their regular classroom setting.
- Carefully wording the content of the announcement and providing written copies to teachers to use in their classrooms. Sample announcements are provided on page 29 of this resource guide.
- Gauging the reactions of the student body to hearing of the tragedy.

It is important to inform students as soon as possible. Delaying a formal announcement may make the situation worse, as rumor can add another dimension to the existing problem. Students may feel that a delay communicates lack of concern or sensitivity by the school staff. It is important to communicate that the staff cares about the people affected by the critical incident and to model appropriate concern.

Do not use the school public address system or an assembly to inform students or staff of a critical incident.

Making the Announcement

- Use a straight forward sympathetic announcement of a loss with a simple statement of condolence. In the case of suicide, respect the wishes of the family. Use some discretion regarding any details of the critical incident. Be as truthful as possible when responding to the questions of students, but keep in mind that early information available about a traumatic event may not be accurate.
- Use a classroom setting to announce a critical incident. Do not use the public address system or an assembly to inform students or staff of a critical incident. Some schools opt to use an assembly as a means to announce a critical incidents. Many districts and schools have warned against this method of announcing a critical incident for various reasons. It is harder to control students in a large group, it is not possible to gauge individual students reactions, and it is difficult to meet the needs of students in such a large group. Holding an assembly may seem to glorify events which should not be glorified, such as a suicide.
- After the announcement in the classroom, allow sufficient time for students to begin to discuss their feelings in their classrooms. Assure students that they will be kept informed as information is available.

Sample Announcements

Announcements of tragedy are like any other form of personal communica-

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tion; they should be simple, straightforward, and unique. These examples can only give you a general idea. They are not intended to be "fill-in-the-blank" forms. Staff who know the student or students involved and the school community can give the personal touch that is needed at such a time.

After the actual announcement, students should be assured that they will have a chance to talk about the critical incident.

AFTER A SUSPECTED SUICIDE....

A tragedy has happened. Sal Williams, a Grade 8 student has died suddenly. Details of Sal's premature death will not be released to protect the privacy of family members. You will be given information about funeral arrangements as soon as possible.

This kind of tragic news is hard to accept. You may experience many feelings within the next few days. Everyone deals with loss differently. It is important to respect the way others grieve. Counsellors are available in room 215. Feel free to go and talk to the counsellors. They want to listen to your feelings and concerns.

AFTER A KNOWN FATALITY....

We are taking this time to think about Anne Rogier, a Grade 4 student at Oakville School who died last night in a car accident. Anne was travelling with her family on Route 17. We do not know any details about the accident at this time except that the rest of the family is safe and no one is injured seriously.

Anne's funeral is being held at Peaceful Rest Funeral Home on Thursday afternoon. A funeral is a special time to remember a person who has died. The school will let your families know about the specific time and address of the funeral home in a written note which will be sent home tomorrow.

Let's take a moment of silence to think of Anne, to remember all the good things about her, and to say goodbye. In our silence we will send her our loving thoughts.

AFTER A FIRE IN A FEEDER SCHOOL...

Last night a very frightening thing happened in our community. Elm Street Elementary School was destroyed by fire. Many of you attended Elm Street School when you were younger and some of you may have brothers and sisters who attend there now.

Luckily, no one was hurt in the fire. But schools mean more to people than just a building. We all have feelings about a school that go beyond the actual walls and roof — many hours of your childhood were spent there. You will have lots of memories connected with the building and you should not be surprised if you feel sad or angry about this happening. Your brothers and sisters who attended Elm Street may be quite upset about the changes that this will mean for them, and they may experience fears because the school was a haven of safety for them.

The police and fire departments have informed us that they do not yet know how the fire started, but we will let you know any facts that are communicated to us as soon as possible.

Suggested class discussion format

School is a place where learning takes place, where it is safe to ask questions and obtain factual information. Adults frequently attempt to insulate children from the realities of death or other tragic event. But children have the capacity to cope with stronger feelings of loss than many of us realize. If children sense that parents and teachers are hiding something, their suspicions can lead to fears and fantasies that are more problematic for them than the truth. A teacher's expression of sorrow in class conveys to students that strong emotions are natural and that mourning does not have to be hidden away. In addition, when students are allowed to grieve in a supervised setting they can have the comfort and reassurance they need which will serve them well when they must deal with subsequent trauma related situations. When people are able to share their feelings and experiences when confronted with tragedy, they feel less helpless and alone.

When people are able to share their feelings and experiences when confronted with tragedy they feel less helpless and alone

Advice for teachers

The following general principals can be helpful when working with students of all ages:

- It is important to acknowledge the reality of the critical incident and your willingness to talk about it.
- Be simple and straightforward. Discuss death or other tragedy in terms the student can easily understand.
- Give the facts regarding the critical incident in a concrete, clear and accurate manner. If the information to be communicated is contained in a written record, it can only be shared within the limits of FOIPPA, see page 42. There is no one rule to describe when such information can be shared. Each situation will need to be analysed by the School Team. This topic is explored in the sample School Team meeting agenda on page 50.
- Express your own feelings in an open, calm way which encourages students to express their grief or fear. Some students choose not to talk; the discussion of the event strikes them as a source of more pain or fear and some have a hard time verbalizing their feelings. These students should not be pressured to talk.
- Be sensitive to possible cultural differences in methods of grieving.
- Project confidence and calmness. Be encouraging and reassuring.
- Listen, acknowledge the loss or fear and have a non-judgemental attitude.
- Be patient. Many times because of their need for reassurance, young children will repeat the same questions. Older children may repeatedly tell about the relationship and reconstruct the loss. Repetitions of this sort are part of the normal grieving process.
- Be prepared for any student(s) who may feel the need to discuss unpleasant features of the relationship. Anger directed toward the deceased person is one of many normal responses to loss. Students

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who may have had recent conflict with the deceased may be particularly affected.

- Assess the meaning of the loss for each child. Pay close attention to those children who have experienced other recent deaths or losses, or, to those who have emotional problems.
- Expect regressive behaviours such as fear of being left alone. Expect physical complaints such as stomachaches and headaches.
- Be aware that both children and adults find it natural to show their empathy during grieving through physical contact such as hugging or touching on the arm.
- Avoid imposing your own theology or/and personal beliefs.
- Assess which students are in need of additional support and refer then to the designated counselling centre for individual assessment and counselling. Have someone accompany them there.

The class discussion

There is no right way to talk about death or other tragedy. The following statements are only examples to guide your class discussion of the critical incident. This sample script can be changed to better fit the situation or the students' needs. Classroom discussions will vary in length depending upon whether the critical incident occurred at school where students may have witnessed some aspect of the event, the age of the students, and their emotional involvement with the injured or deceased. Some discussions may be as brief as a few minutes, while others will continue for an entire class period.

Beginning script

1. "Something very sad has happened. Laurie Evans, a Grade 7 student, has died in a car accident. This kind of sad news is hard to accept. You will probably have many feelings in the next while. You could be sad, angry, confused, depressed, afraid, or have no feelings at all for some time. When I've felt like this, it has helped me to talk to someone. Sharing my feelings made it easier, although not less painful, to deal with the tragedy. If you'd like to talk about the situation, I'd be glad to take time to do that. I'll try to answer any questions as well as I can.
2. Encourage children to share their own memories related to the critical incident. "What are some of the things you want to remember about Westlake School?"

Responding

3. Acknowledge that a wide variety of feelings are normal. There is no one right way to react to a tragedy. Feelings will vary from student to student and will change over time. Some possible responses include:
   - "Some of you feel angry that Laurie died. What can you do with your angry feelings?"
   - "It's okay that some of you are very scared or angry as a result of hearing about this fire at the elementary school and some only a little sad or scared."

- "Because Laurie died, you may be reminded of others that you cared for who have died."
- "It's okay to forget Laurie sometimes when you work and play."
- "It's okay to cry - it's all right."

4. Acknowledge that you don't possess all the answers. Often there is more comfort from an honest, "I don't know why," than from an attempt at explanations that don't sound credible.
5. Acknowledge the various cultural or religious beliefs that may be expressed.

Be simple and straightforward Discuss death or other tragedy in terms the student can easily understand

Concluding

6. Focus on the strengths and supports the students have to get the help they need:
   - the support that comes from sharing feelings of grief or fear with others,
   - the student's support network, such as family, significant adults, teachers, counsellors. Have each student think of someone he/she can go to for support, and
   - the student's individual strengths which provide self-support.
7. Talk about the natural healing process. "Over time the pain of missing Laurie won't hurt so much. That's the way it should be. It doesn't mean that you loved Laurie any less."
8. "Class is almost over, and it seems there's more to talk about. Perhaps we can set aside some time tomorrow."
9. Give information about the designated counselling centre. "Designated counselling areas where you can go to talk about your feelings are available. The designated counselling centre will be located in the nurse's office for the next three days. You can use the designated counselling centre whenever you like. The people in the centre want to help you. They will listen to your feelings and concerns. They want to try to help you."
10. It is helpful to channel the feelings of the class into appropriate expressions of concern. It may provide comfort for students to feel they have participated in some overt act to express their feelings and reach out to grieving families affected by the critical incident. Teachers will need to use their own judgement to guide the appropriateness of student activities, and they may need to be cleared with the school principal or counsellor. Some possible actions include the following:

Statements to avoid

11. Avoid euphemisms for death such as "passed away," "gone," or "sleep" which may confuse or frighten the child.
12. Avoid the general statement, "If you need anything, tell me...." It is better to say "Would it help if I...?" Students may find it difficult to verbalize their own needs and will require assistance to find a way to describe the support they want.

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Suicide Risk Factors

Following a suicide or a sudden death, students may be more vulnerable to suicide attempts, especially those who had a particular relationship with the deceased (Those who had a romantic relationship, had a fight, knew about the plans for suicide...) or because of their proximity to the deceased ("discovered" the body...) Below are some examples of reactions that can suggest potential suicidal behaviour:

- an excessive grief response,
- an extreme change in behaviour,
- statements that indicate a student wants to join the deceased,
- statements that indicate a suicide pact has been made, "I have to join him," or "I promised to do something,"
- previous suicide attempts, and/or
- other recent major losses, such as a divorce in the family, the break up of a romantic relationship, or a move to a new community and the accompanied loneliness.

13. Avoid saying "I know just how you feel." It is more empathetic to say "You must be having a lot of feelings right now..."
14. Avoid blaming or judging.

The Class Discussion in the Event of a Suicide

Most students over eight years of age are old enough to understand the suicidal act. Children and teens often have romantic fantasies about death which must not be encouraged. Helping adults should be truthful, but not dwell on the details of how the student took his or her own life.

This type of sudden loss may bring with it a heavy overlay of guilt, shame, self-doubt and self-blame as well as feelings of anger, betrayal and rejection. Teachers should be prepared to encounter and validate these expressions. Bereavement and mourning can be more intense and extreme in the case of a suicide. School counsellors, who have been trained in suicide prevention, should have a key role in providing support to staff and students.

If the family has agreed that the death was a suicide, it is appropriate to use that term. If not, the class discussions will need to be conducted as for a sudden death.

Possible Script Following a Suicide

1. "A very sad thing happened today. Terry Stone, a Grade 9 student has committed suicide. Details of the death will not be released to protect the privacy of his family. This kind of news is hard to accept. You will probably experience many feelings within the next while. You may feel sad, angry, confused, numb, depressed or even guilty. This was Terry's choice and it is important to remember that he is responsible for making the decision to kill himself."
2. "You are not responsible."
3. "This kind of death does not need to happen. Studies suggest that at the moment of suicide, individuals think death is the only way out. Although it may not seem possible, feelings and circumstances can change. Many people when they feel unhappy or unloved think about hurting themselves. But there are many better options. There are people who can help." Students can be reminded about the counselling centres currently operating in the school, as well as the ongoing support that is available through the school counsellor or community mental health services.
4. "Some people who commit suicide believe that people will care more about them after they are dead, than when they were alive. This is not the case."
5. At the end of the discussion, help students understand the importance of talking to someone when they feel despondent. Elicit suggestions from the class as to whom they would talk to, and ask each individual student to privately think of those people to whom they would turn.
6. Students should be reminded to anticipate rumours and misinformation and that they should not automatically believe anything they hear.
7. For younger children and pre-adolescents, it is important to confirm the fact that any death, including suicide, is final and irreversible.

Communication with individual students

Certain students may require individual attention. Students who are considered high risk need to be identified and offered help at the time of the incident. It may also be necessary to provide these individuals with on an ongoing basis. Check in with students who would be considered to be high-risk on a regular basis, particularly at high-risk times. High risk times include anniversaries of a previous death; birthdays, holidays, expected graduation date, etc. of the deceased student and the high risk student's own birthday.

The following descriptors are helpful in identifying a high risk individual:

- Participated in any way with a suicide or accident.
- Knew of suicide attempt or potential attempt and did not try to stop it.
- Feels guilty about things they said or did to the deceased prior to the death.
- Had recently punished or threatened to punish the deceased for some misdeed; did not take a suicide threat seriously, or had been too busy to talk to a victim who asked for help.
- Were relatives, best friends, self-appointed therapists or those mentioned in a suicidal note.
- Identifies with the victim's situation, has a history of suicidal threats or attempts, or is desperate and now considers suicide a viable alternative.

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Communication with Parents/Guardians

Parents will want information when a critical incident in the school community may be affecting their children. Depending on the nature of the traumatic event, the entire community may be affected. Special communications to parents can be extremely helpful in gaining their support for the school and in reaching satisfactory closure to the incident for students. In some cases communication by telephone may be advisable. In other cases, where the number of contacts precludes telephone contact, a letter is more useful.

Suggestions for communications with parents by telephone

- The person doing the telephoning should be comfortable with the role and ideally have experience or training in counselling.
- Prepare a script similar to the one used to announce the event to students, which covers the facts of the critical incident.
- Be sensitive to possible emotional reactions by a parent and use active listening skills to calm an upset parent.
- Personally contact the parents of any student who has had a difficult time coping with the traumatic event and give information about community mental health resources which parents may wish to access for their children.
- Reassure parents that the school is responding to the critical incident and describe the response activities.

Suggestions for written communication with parents

Depending on the impact of the critical incident, a letter may be sent home with every student in the class or classes involved and, in some cases, with the entire school. Information to be included in the letter should be checked carefully with the police or other relevant experts. Clearing the content of the communication to parents with the Superintendent is advised. Care needs to be exercised in following Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act requirements. This letter could include the following information:

- the nature of the critical incident and appropriate details,
- what the students have been told,
- possible grief/stress reactions that parents may expect in their children,
- suggestions of how they might respond to their children's reactions,
- in the case of a death, the funeral arrangements, and
- resources available to parents.

This resource guide provides examples of letters and pamphlets which can be used to plan communication with parents/guardians. See page 36 - Communication with parents/guardians and Appendix 7 - Material for parents following a critical incident.

Communications with parents at the school site

Make plans to accommodate parents who come to the school following a critical incident.

Parents or other concerned community members may gravitate to the school in response to a critical incident. They may wish to take their children home or may be looking for information or help with their own emotional responses to the incident.

Plans should include advance arrangements for how to deal effectively with these adults. Experienced schools report that it is a good idea to pre-arrange a space to accommodate these individuals.

Support materials for parents on how to help students deal with trauma can be made available and information about community resources can be provided. Appendix 7 of this document provides three pamphlets, drawn from materials developed by School District 38 (Richmond), School District 36 (Surrey) and Health and Welfare Canada's publication, *Personal Services* (Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1990).

Special communications to parents can be extremely helpful in gaining their support

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SAMPLE LETTERS TO PARENTS - 1

[redacted]

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian:

We have suffered a tragedy at our school. On December 12th, one of our students, Ari Nadden, died suddenly and unexpectedly. In addition to our grief over the loss of this member of our school community, we are sensitive to the fact that such an event has an impact on other students.

In response, the school has implemented a plan which allows students an opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings with trained professional staff. We expect that some will seek out this help, while others may not. Those who do will be given an opportunity to express their feelings and grief. This is not intended to take the place of outside professional counselling or religious care.

Anticipating that your child may have a reaction to this event, we have some information available to you at your request which could be helpful as you respond to you child's concerns, If you should determine that your child needs further professional counselling, please feel free to contact the school for phone numbers of local agencies that are available to assist you.

Please do not hesitate to contact the school regarding your requests or concerns at 555-1234.

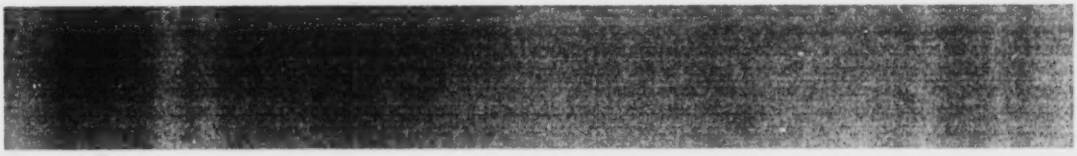
Sincerely,

Rachel More, Principal

[redacted]

All names and situations used in sample materials are fictional

SAMPLE LETTERS TO PARENTS - 2



Dear Parent(s)/Guardian:

It is with sadness that I inform you of the Death of a Grade 2 student in our school. Bill Wong died from injuries suffered in a car accident which occurred last evening.

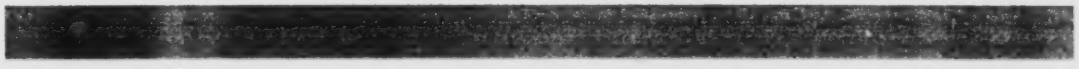
Students will have varied reactions to the death of a peer. A wide range of reactions is normal in the grief process and can vary from withdrawal, to crying and anger. I encourage you to openly discuss with your child their reactions and feelings regarding the death of Bill.

Special counselling services have been made available to students today and will continue to be available throughout the week and longer, if needed.

If you think your child needs additional counselling support, please do not hesitate to contact the school office at 555-1234.

Sincerely,

Randy Miller, Principal



All names and situations used in sample materials are fictional

Guidelines for Dealing with the Media

During crisis situations, schools may find that the news media are planning to report on the events as they occur. It is important to have an established protocol in order to protect school personnel and the student body from misrepresentation or exploitation, and to ensure that the information provided to the media is appropriate, accurate and prompt. In addition, consultation may need to take place with Board officials or legal advisors to ensure that Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy requirements are followed as well as limitations to publishing information under the Young Offenders Act. See page 42 for more information on legal considerations.

Identifying a Spokesperson

The District Critical Incidence Response Team and the school principal should decide together who should deal with the media. The Superintendent is frequently the district media contact; in other instances, the board Chair or the school principal is appointed to be the contact. Depending on the nature of the critical incident, the appropriate person may vary. Where appropriate this person can met with the family or families and other individuals such as the police to determine sensitive issues.

The wishes of the family are crucial in making decisions about the information provided to the media. The manner and content of the information released to the media can have serious legal implications for the school district.

The contact person should be available for radio, television, or newspaper interviews. It may be advisable to prepare a formal press release for some types of critical incidents.

Sample Protocol

The following is one example of a district protocol. In this instance, the Superintendent is the designated media contact person.

1. All requests for information about the events surrounding a critical incident must be referred to the Superintendent or Superintendent's Delegate. The Superintendent is directly responsible for communicating with all media.
2. The Principal or designated member of the School Team should ensure that the Superintendent has access to all information about the events as they become known in order to carry out this role effectively.
3. A brief prepared statement directing media inquiries to the Superintendent should be written and available for secretaries or other persons who may be answering telephone inquiries or any other requests for information by the media.
4. School personnel should check with the Principal before speaking to reporters. It is not a good idea to speak to the media "off the record."
5. The media may not interview students on school premises unless the interviews are approved by the Superintendent or his/her designate.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE - 1

[redacted]

For Immediate Release

December 14, 2000

As reported by the Townsville detachment of the RCMP, Ari Nadden, a student at Townsville Middle School, was found dead on December 12. The circumstances of Ari's death are not known at this time and an investigation is being conducted by the RCMP.

This is a tragic loss to Ari's family and to our community. To assist in supporting our students and their families through this time of grief, additional school district counselling staff have been assigned to the school to provide professional counselling services. A letter has been sent by the school to parents, informing them of this incident and providing information on the counselling services available through the school.

Students and staff who were close to Ari will be attending a memorial service on December 16 at 2 p.m. at Grey's funeral chapel.

--30--

Contact: Bill Smith, Superintendent, School District 00 at 555-5678, or
Rachel More, Principal, Townsville Middle School at 555-1234.

[redacted]

All names and situations used in sample materials are fictional

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE - 2

For Immediate Release

Monday, May 24, 1999

Historic school destroyed by fire

Huckleberry Elementary School was destroyed by fire in the early hours of Saturday morning. Firefighters and the RCMP responded to a 911 call reporting the blaze at 3 a.m. Saturday. There were no injuries reported. The cause of the fire is under investigation. Damage is estimated at $8 million.

"It is a tragedy to have lost this school, not only for our students and their families, but for our community." Board Chair Stephanie Smith said. "Schools are much more than a place of learning. They are where our communities meet - for special events, to vote and to play. Huckleberry school, in particular, was a landmark in our community with historical building designation." Huckleberry Elementary School was built in 1906 and has undergone substantial renovations in recent years.

Arrangements have been made to house Huckleberry School's 300 Grade 1 to Grade 7 students at Pine Elementary School and Oak Elementary School for the remainder of this school year, with the addition of portables at both school sites. All parents were contacted by telephone on Sunday.

The School Board will be announcing plans for the replacement of the school as soon as possible.

--30--

Contact: Bill Smith, Superintendent, School District 00 at 555-5678, or
Stephanie Smith, Board Chair, School District 00 at 555-9102

All names and situations used in sample materials are fictional

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Various statutes regulate the collection, use and disclosure of information by Boards of Education. The facts of every case of critical incident will determine when it is legally appropriate to collect, use and disclose personal information and to whom that information may be disclosed.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY ACT

This Act, often referred to by its acronym FOIPPA restricts the collection and disclosure of written personal information by Boards and regulates the storage of such information.

AUTHORITY TO COLLECT AND DISCLOSE PERSONAL INFORMATION

Information may be collected under FOIPPA for various purposes, one of which is that the information relates directly to and is necessary for the operating program or activity of the public body.

Sections 33 and 34 of the Act permit the disclosure of personal information on various bases, including the following:

- with the consent of the individual to whom the information relates,
- for the purpose that the personal information was obtained or a consistent use with the purpose,
- to a public body or law enforcement agency in Canada to assist in an investigation undertaken for the purpose of law enforcement proceedings, or from which law enforcement proceedings are likely to result.

If information was obtained to provide counselling to students and staff as a result of a critical incident because it is felt that students cannot continue to be effectively taught, will not attend school, or the school cannot continue to function effectively without the provision of this counselling, then that information can be used for that purpose or a "consistent use."

It is hard to determine what will or will not be considered a consistent use without looking at a specific factual situation with each critical incident. The facts will determine whether personal information can be disclosed under consistent use. For personal information to be disclosed on this basis, the information must have a reasonable and direct connection with the purpose for which it was obtained, and the use of it must be consistent with the statutory duties of the school board (such as providing an educational program to students) or it is necessary for the school board to operate a legally authorized program.

It is important to understand that personal information related to a deceased person is still covered by FOIPPA. The Act also regulates how personal information is used within a public body as well as disclosure to the public. FOIPPA regulates the oral or written disclosure of any written record held by the Board.

The Young Offenders Act

Notices, announcements, written copies of announcements, letters or information for parents and press releases about critical incidents need to be written carefully to meet the requirements of legislation related to young offenders. This Young Offenders Act, often referred to as YOA, limits the publication of names of young offenders.

Under Section 4 of the Young Offenders Act (BC), section 38 of the Young Offenders Act (Canada) applies. This section states that no report can be published respecting the offence committed or alleged to have been committed by a young person, in which the name of the young person (who is the alleged perpetrator) or the name of a young person or child who is a victim or witness is mentioned.

There are two exceptions to this general rule. The first exception is if there is an order under section 16 of the YOA. This refers to cases in which a youth court orders a young person to be tried in adult court. The other exception is in a case in which a judge makes an order that permits a report that identifies the young person.

Disclosures to any professional or person engaged in supervisory care of a young person, a representative of any school board or school, or any other educational or training institution can only be made if it is necessary to ensure the safety of staff, students and other persons. Keeping a record of this type of information is also restricted to this same requirement.

CHECKLISTS AND AGENDAS

School Team - critical incident checklist

The following items are sample actions for a checklist which can be adapted by the School Teams to suit the protocol developed in a particular school.

- Assist principal in preparing written instructions for staff to be distributed at the staff meeting or into the hands of staff.
- Compile a list of staff who may require extra support because of their closeness to the deceased.
- Assign a team member to classes where the teacher has requested this type of assistance.
- Gather and maintain a list of at risk students, including those who were absent and also at risk, and review their need for further individual attention.
- Assist counsellors in arranging counselling centres and grief groups.
- Recommend to the principal those students who may need to go home or may require additional community mental health resources. Ensure that parents are informed.
- Contact other schools where siblings, team mates, or close friends of people directly affected by the critical incident may be attending. In case of a staff death, all schools in the district should be contacted.
- Assist in organizing the school or staff's role in visitation, funeral, or memorial arrangements in the case of a student or staff death(s).
- Meet after school to review the day, inform staff about arrangements for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing and plan for the next day's activities.
- Be available to discuss concerns regarding students or procedures to be followed with any staff member.
- Arrange Critical Incident Stress Debriefing for staff.
- Ensure that school records related to the student are handled in a sensitive and appropriate manner.
- In carrying out any activities related to using or creating records, consult with the Superintendent or FOIPPA administrator in the district.

TEACHER - CRITICAL INCIDENT CHECKLIST

The following items are sample actions for a teacher checklist which can be adapted by the School Teams to fit the protocol developed in a particular school.

Teachers play a vital role in helping students or staff deal with their feelings regarding critical incidents such as the death of a student or staff member. If a teacher is uncomfortable in carrying out the actions of this checklist, assistance should be requested from the School Team.

- ❑ Attend staff meeting and obtain all possible information.
- ❑ Follow instructions in handout received from the principal and School Team.
- ❑ Request a School Team member to lead the class discussion if you feel uncomfortable.
- ❑ Allow students to express their feelings openly and facilitate the classroom discussion by modelling listening and sharing feelings and reactions with students. See page 31 for class discussion ideas.
- ❑ Direct any students who appear to need further assistance to the appropriate support personnel; allow students to go to the designated counselling centres. Arrange for someone to accompany young children or students who are in distress. Keep at list of these students and give to the School Team.
- ❑ Provide the names of any students or staff considered to be at risk or in need of counselling support to the School Team.
- ❑ Attend after school staff meeting.
- ❑ Participate in Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.

SCHOOL STAFF - CRITICAL INCIDENT CHECKLIST

All school personnel are affected by a critical incident such as a disaster or the death of a student or staff member; everyone should be clear about his/her role in dealing with a tragic event. The following is a sample checklist for school personnel who are not teachers which can be adapted by a School Team to fit the protocol developed in a particular school.

- ❑ If possible, attend the staff meeting to be informed about the traumatic event and the plans for the school day. If you are unable to attend, contact a member of the School Team and get the information.
- ❑ Ensure that you are informed of appropriate strategies to handle students' questions or comments. Redirecting students to teachers or counselling staff may be an appropriate response.
- ❑ Ensure that you are clear on procedures for handling requests or calls from parents, news media and others. Be aware that extra personnel may be in the building, but report anyone who appears to be on school grounds inappropriately to the Principal immediately.
- ❑ Provide names of any students or staff whom you are concerned about to the School Team.
- ❑ Attend after school staff meeting.
- ❑ Participate in Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.

Sample School Team meeting agenda

The following sample School Team meeting agenda can be adapted to fit the protocol developed in a particular school.

1. Share information with the team regarding the facts of the traumatic event. No information should be shared with anyone else until a decision is made about what information is to be shared and the process for notifying staff and students. When this decision about disclosure of personal information is made, care must be taken to ensure that requirements of FOIPPA are followed. Under FOIPPA on e of the basis for disclosing personal information is called "consistent use." That is, the disclosure of the information is permitted if it is directly related to the purpose of which it was received, and it is necessary to use it to operate the school or meet other statutory obligations. Meeting the emotional needs of students and staff so that the school can function might be considered a "consistent use."
2. Determine the impact of this particular incident on individual members of the School Team in order to ensure that all members can function objectively. Assess the likely impact of the critical incident on classes and individuals. Consider the impact for anyone in the school community who may have recently experienced a significant death or loss. Are there staff members who may require assistance in leading the classroom discussion?
3. Determine whether there are the cultural or religious implications surrounding the incident. How should they be addressed?
4. Identify school resources. Are there other staff members who might be helpful additions to the team in this situation?
5. Determine whether additional counsellors are required to provide support to the team and work with students. Assess the extent of the need for additional resources. The team could be augmented by a variety of school district and/or community resources such as First Nations support workers, behaviour support workers, multicultural home-school workers, community mental health personnel and other medical-health professionals.
6. Confirm the overall strategy and the specific roles of Response Team members for this particular crisis.
7. Develop an agenda for the general staff meeting and prepare a written statement for the meeting about the critical incident.
8. Decide whether it would be appropriate to send home a brief announcement about the critical incident. Sample letters are included on pages 38 and 39.

SAMPLE STAFF MEETING AGENDA

The following sample staff meeting agenda can be adapted by the School Team to fit the protocol developed in a particular school.

1. Attendance - anyone who is not present should be informed of the critical incident as soon as possible following the meeting.
2. Provide as much accurate information as possible, including:
   - names of the students or staff members directly involved,
   - time and place of the event,
   - any additional information surrounding the event, and
   - names and grades of the siblings of those directly affected who are also in the school.
3. Introduce the School Team, members of the District Team, and any additional support staff or community resource people who are present and explain their roles.
4. Briefly review the school response plan. Provide extra copies.
   - Prepare teachers to deal effectively with informing their students of the critical incident.

     - Give directions and model how students should be told.

     - Encourage teachers to allow time for classroom discussion.

     - Provide all staff with a copy of the protocol for class discussion. See page 31 for guidelines on leading a classroom discussion.
   - Clarify procedures for handling students who want to leave the classroom.

     - Students who are highly emotional should be accompanied to the designated counselling centre.

     - Students who wish to leave the school should only be released to a parent, guardian or their designate.
   - Inform teachers of counselling support plans.

     - Identify counselling staff who will run the counselling centre and the appropriate procedure for sending students to the centre.

     - Clarify the way to get counselling assistance for staff members.

     - Inform staff of any outside agencies involved in student or staff counselling.
   - Ask for staff help to identify students who may be at risk or need extra support.

     -Make counselling plans for all students who are potentially at risk for suicide or other serious emotional responses to the critical incident.

     -Direct staff to refer students who appear to be emotionally unstable to the counsellors.
   - Review media policy
   - Inform all staff of any changes to the regular school schedule or cancellation of normal school events.
5. Set the date and time of a follow-up meeting.
   - Assure staff that they will be kept informed of any relevant information in this update meeting.
   - Follow up meeting will provide an opportunity for staff members to discuss classroom experiences and report information back to the group.

Critical Incident Contact List

School Team

Name	Role/Position	Phone	Phone (alternate)	Fax

District Team

Name	Role/Position	Phone	Phone (alternate)	Fax

Other Key Community Contacts

(Ministry for Children and Families, police, ambulance, mental health, suicide prevention, media, etc.)

Organization	Contact Person	Phone	Phone (alternate)	Fax

APPENDICES

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COUNSELLING DROP-IN CENTRES

Setting up a temporary drop-in counselling centre following a critical incident is an effective way to support students, particularly those considered high risk. All available school counsellors, with possible support from available community counsellors and selected members of the School Team, can staff the drop-in centre. The duration of this service will depend upon the nature and impact of the incident. The following suggestions for planning and operating such a service have been used successfully by schools.

GUIDELINES FOR SETTING UP A DROP-IN COUNSELLING CENTRE

1. Provide a Drop-in Counselling Centre all day the first day that news of a critical incident such as a sudden death is disseminated.
2. Ensure that more than one counsellor/facilitator is in the centre at all times. Other staff should be available for relief purposes. Counselling in the centre may be with individuals or small groups.
3. Staff who provide counselling in the centre should organize themselves to maintain continuity in spite of the "drop-in" process, so that adults may consult with each other about identifying high risk students as well as for general support and help.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STAFF IN THE DROP-IN COUNSELLING CENTRE

- Accept all responses from students and permit them to express their reactions in a way that is individually appropriate.
- Let the students to express feelings about other personal losses such as deaths in their families or other traumatic events. A critical incident may bring up painful memories or unresolved emotions from the past.
- Listen to the students express their feelings without making judgements. Be empathetic and encourage them to discuss how they are feeling.
- Be genuine. Do not try to convince students that you understand their feelings. Say "I want to understand your feelings. Please tell me some more so that I can try to understand where you are coming from."
- Discuss the facts and the critical incident and discourage rumours. Ensure that confidential information is not revealed in discussions in the counselling centre.
- If the incident was a suicide or if the students mention suicide in response to another type of traumatic event, reinforce that suicide is always an unwise decision, without moralizing. Focus suggestions on other options for dealing with serious problems.
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss feelings of guilt related to the tragedy. They may need reassurance that they are not responsible.
- Help students who may become fearful for their own safety and that of family members or peers. Remember that critical incidents can spark disclosure of child abuse or other ways that students are at risk.

- Carefully monitor the student's response to you. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the intensity of the response, seek immediate assistance from other staff.
- Be vigilant to any expression of suicidal thoughts. Remember that a well thought-out plan to commit suicide is a significant danger sign which should signal immediate action for staff and/or family. Seek immediate assistance, and do not leave the student alone until you have it.

GUIDELINES FOR A GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

In some instances, schools may decide to set up a grief support group which will meet on a longer term basis following the death of a student or other person in the school community. Other schools may choose to call on community agencies to provide this service. The following suggestions are designed for schools who wish to establish their own grief support groups. When counselling staff decide to set up a group of students to meet together, they might want to consider focusing on some of the following topics:

- Assuring the students that it is normal to have feelings of anger, guilt or fear,
- Planning acceptable activities to respond following a death such as appropriate ways of communicating with the family of the deceased,
- Encouraging students to recall personal memories and in particular positive experiences involving the person who died,
- Sharing feelings about how this death connects to other losses in their lives,
- Discussing the stages of grieving, and
- Encouraging students to involve their peers who may need support and/or counselling.

Grief group meetings should be brought to a close when appropriate. Some students may need continued individual counselling on a one-to-one basis. The group may need to reconvene for a brief meeting if future events require it. In some instance the anniversary of a critical incident calls for such a meeting.

Additional support may need to be arranged for some members of the group to get ongoing support. Throughout the life of the grief support group, facilitators need to identify students with chronic problems around the issue of suicide or other self-destructive behaviours and obtain additional services to meet their more serious needs.

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING

Critical Incident Debriefing , sometimes called CID or Critical Incident Stress Debriefing in the literature, has been developed as a structured intervention to help groups who have been affected by a critical incident. Jeffrey Mitchell of the Department of Emergency Health Services, University of Maryland, developed the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing for use with fire and other emergency response workers who experience traumatic events in their work.

Sometimes an entire class, staff or whole school community is affected as a group by a critical incident. The death of a student or staff member, a natural disaster occurring during school hours, witnessing of a violent crime, child abuse by a staff member, and other traumatic events can present the need for a group intervention. An adapted form of Mitchell's debriefing method can be used to deal with such situations. Such debriefings are not a substitute for professional counselling or psychotherapy, but an opportunity for the group, whether students or staff, to sort out the events and to deal with the crisis.

Mitchell's work describes debriefings as structured group discussions which allow individuals to express their reactions to the critical incident and to develop understanding of the event and their own emotions. This process helps the individual to increase their own feeling of personal control. Research has indicated that ongoing support is still needed by people who have experienced trauma even if Critical Incident Stress Debriefing does have a positive short term affect.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADING A SCHOOL GROUP

The school counsellor or sometimes a skilled classroom teacher will be the leader of a debriefing for students. The purpose of a debriefing discussion is not therapy, but rather education which goes beyond that provided in the classroom by the initial session in which students were informed of the critical incident. The key actions involve the establishment of ground rules, exploration of facts, sharing of feelings, and learning about future possibilities. If no staff person in the school is trained in critical incident debriefing techniques, then the School Critical Incident Team should find a counsellor or other experienced person from outside the school to assist in the group. The style of the leader can vary, but the qualities of warmth, acceptance, and a non-threatening nature combined with the ability to control the group process quietly are particularly helpful.

GROUND RULES

The leader should set the ground rules for the debriefing session or discussion. Alternatively the ground rules may be developed by the group in order to make them feel more comfortable. These rules may vary, but some commonly used ones include the following:

- maintain confidentiality ("What is said here stays here."),
- no put-downs,
- no interruptions, and
- speak only for yourself.

In making any assurance of confidentiality, the leader should remind the group of any limits to confidentiality such as the duty to report child abuse or endangerment. It is not uncommon for the feelings of trauma after a critical incident to create a climate for disclosure of other traumatic events.

Discussion format

During group discussion, the leader will need to ensure that each individual has an opportunity to contribute. For example, during the facts and feelings portions of a debriefing, individuals are invited to share what they saw when they experienced the incident, what they have heard about it, and what they have felt. Using the word "felt" can confirm the ambiguity of sensations versus the validity of feelings. Relating the material in a group "round robin" can allow the reality of the experience to emerge and gives each person an opportunity to participate. The leader will have to decide whether to allow open discussion or keep it controlled. Care must be taken that each individual has an opportunity to share, but is not coerced by the group or the leader. If a student appears to need further support, the teacher should immediately refer them to the school/district counsellor or principal.

Managing the appropriate timing for discussion is another decision the leader must make. If the session becomes dominated by an individual or digresses into unproductive discussion, it should be ended. As long as it is focused and constructive, it should go on.

Connections to past incidents

As the group discusses the critical incident and their own responses, students may need to talk about similar incidents they have experienced or heard about in the past. This is a normal behaviour as part of the process of sorting out the present experience. The present critical incident may be less serious than the past one, such as the death of a student who is not known bringing up feelings about the death of a parent.

Children may disclose facts about abuse or family violence in the atmosphere following a critical incident, so groups leaders need to ensure that they are knowledgeable about the protocol for reporting abuse for child protection. The facilitator will also need to be sensitive to underlying social issues related to the critical incident and feel comfortable discussing them in a frank and honest manner. The leader may need to provide clarification and provide a balanced understanding of the current crisis in the context of larger issues affecting young people in our society.

Jeffrey Mitchell s critical incident stress debriefing

(Adapted to a school setting)

1. Introductory phase

The choice of facilitator will depend on the nature of the group. In the case of a school staff, the facilitator might be the principal, school counsellor or a trained community person. For a class of students, the leader will usually be their regular teacher. The person leading the session should be the first to present the facts or any new information about the incident and should also set the basic rules for participation to provide security for the group.

Our source

Resources used in the development of this material include: "Development and Functions of a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team," *Journal of Emergency Medical Services*, December, 1988 and "When Disaster Strikes... The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Process," *Journal of Emergency Medical Services*, January, 1983, both by Jeffrey T. Mitchell.

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Talking about disturbing events is difficult. Providing a clear structure and an assurance of confidentiality is important. The group needs to be protected from fear of social judgement so they can risk expressing feelings. The facilitator sets the tone for the entire session during the introductory phase.

2. Facts phase

The participants discuss the sequence of events surrounding the critical incident and the role each may have played in the incident or in responding to the incident. During this phase, each person should have an opportunity to describe the incident from his or her perspective. By the end of this phase, everyone should feel clear about the events and realize that they are not alone in the experience and emotional responses to the incident. From this, a shared perspective of the incident will begin to emerge.

3. Feelings phase

During this phase, members of the group or class are encouraged to explore their feelings in a supportive context. Each person is given an opportunity to share his or her feelings without pressure. Some individuals can still benefit from listening, even if they are not comfortable expressing their feelings in the group. The facilitator needs to ensure that the participants all understand that feelings are not right or wrong; they just are.

The facilitator needs to ensure that the participants all understand that feelings are not right or wrong; they just are.

4. Teaching phase

The facilitator of the session teaches or review for the group the nature of normal reactions to a critical incident and anticipated reactions. The group learns about post traumatic responses, so they can validate the normalcy of their individual experiences. Misconceptions are cleared up and the group is informed of other resources, such as the school counsellors or employee assistance services. Community resources, beyond the school district, can be discussed. A list of community resources should be made available to students, parents and staff.

5. Closure phase

A debriefing can be a significant event in the life of the staff or class and can affirm group cohesiveness and the community sense of the school. In the final phase of the meeting, the group may decide to devise some plan of action to regain a feeling of at least partial control over fate. The facilitator should invite the group or individuals to a further discussion at a later date so that they will know that support could continue past this session.

The group's sense of security needs to be established by a return to a normal routine at the end of the debriefing session. The critical incident has been a disruption and changes in routine made to deal with the critical incident further disrupt people's lives. Plans designed to provide support can themselves become unsettling. A sense of hope and continuity will be provided by a return to the normal daily routine. The facilitator should firmly lead the group back to the normal routine, and at the same time be sensitive to people who are not ready and need immediate support of a health professional or counsellor.

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UNDERSTANDING AND COPING WITH GRIEF

Grief is a process. It is the work we must do to come to terms with loss. Grief is not a single emotion, but rather it is a constellation of feelings which can be expressed through a variety of behaviours and thoughts. Because there are many ways to express grief, there are many ways to resolve grief. It should be remembered, then, that children who are grieving may show a variety of physiological symptoms and psychological and behavioural responses. Since there are varying theories on the child's concept of death, it is helpful to ask the student for his/her own interpretation of what happened in order to deal with the issues at the most appropriate level of understanding.

THE GRIEF PROCESS

Grief is a natural and normal process. It is a physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological response. Grieving is a common life process.

Grief is the healthiest way to accept a loss and put it into perspective. It helps us to face the reality of loss, to recover, and to grow through the experience. The expression of grief may differ with each individual, yet follow a broad common framework. It is important to understand the process of grief.

No matter what type of loss is experienced, the same process is generally gone through each time, although the length and intensity of the experience will differ. The stages of grief are not necessarily in a particular order. An individual may flow back and forth between stages. There is no set time for an individual to spend in each stage. To reach a level of acceptance may take months or years.

This appendix provides three resources that are useful in gaining a perspective on the grief process and the possible grief reactions of children and adults. These include the Stages of Grief developed by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, descriptors of Children's Concept of Death and suggested ways to provide comfort to a grieving child or an adult.

Stages of Grief

This is a description of the adult grief process which was originally developed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her book, *On Death and Dying*. It is widely used in the field of hospice for dying patients. Ross's stages were originally developed from her work with dying cancer patients, but the stages have been generalized and applied to many other areas of adult grieving.

Stage	Type of behaviour
Shock and Denial	• Appears inactive, expressionless, numb • Exhibits denial, disbelief • Feels disorganized • Loses appetite
Fear	• Feels terror • Panics in absence of parents • Feels helpless • Fears something will happen to loved one or self • Develops physical symptoms, sleep disturbances
Anger	• Resents others and self • Exhibits uncooperative and rude behaviour • May become angry at those trying to help
Guilt	• Blames self for loss • Has lowered self-esteem • May seek to punish self
Depression	• Feels empty • Appears unhappy and cries excessively • Yearns or searches for lost object or person • Withdraws, is silent
Acceptance	• Has experienced separation or loss and is able to cope • Feels hopeful • Reorganizes life and focuses on the present

Although considered classic for adults, children's grieving is not commonly described with the same adult stages. Terese Rando uses different descriptors for the stages of grieving for children in her book *Grief, Dying and Death:*

- avoidance
- confrontation
- reestablishment.

Children's Concept of Death

This is a commonly accepted description of children's concepts of death at different ages. Children develop at different rates and may not fit these categories exactly. Different cultures vary in their concepts of death as well as in their methods of grieving.

3-5 Years Old

These children do not yet accept death as a permanent process. Death is seen as an ending. They fear separation and abandonment more than death. Children may feel mad or sad that someone is not coming home. They often ask questions such as "When will grandma come back?"

5-9 Years Old

Children of this age are beginning to understand that death is very concrete and irreversible. They may fear darkness and being alone. They know the body decays, but believe the spirit still lives. Talk openly to clear up misconceptions and lessen fears. Reassure children that they will be looked after and accept that their level of conceptual understanding necessitates a concrete view of death.

10-14 Years Old

Children are beginning to understand and accept a mature, realistic explanation of death as final and inevitable. They are developing their independence from parents but are not yet fully established individuals. Consequently, a death, especially of a peer, can cause considerable distress based on a fear for their own security. They may refuse to believe they are mortal.

15-18 Years Old

Teens are aware of complex social issues. They are moving to a more abstract level of thinking and yet their tendency is to react, especially in the death of a person, in a highly dramatic intense fashion, with a reliance on personalized rituals, symbols, etc. Their energy can appear to come in great spurts and their responses can be unpredictable.

Adult

The variety of grief response in adults is extensive, largely due to how previous losses have or have not been resolved. It is important to remember that culture plays an important role in how the experience of death is expressed and resolved.

Suggested ways to provide comfort

To comfort a grieving child:

- **Be yourself**. Show your natural concern and sorrow in your own way and own words.
- **Be there**. Spend time with the child walking, reading, talking. Spend some time with the child away from the group.
- **Listen**. Be sure to have good eye contact. Use simple, direct words. Let the child be mad or express other feelings.
- **Explain things**. Give information about what's going to happen. Keep promises made. Be as predictable as possible.
- **Comfort the child**. Don't assume that a seemingly calm child is not sorrowing. If you can, be a friend to whom feelings can be confided and with whom tears can be shed.

To comfort a grieving adult

- **Be there.** Attend the funeral, visit, call and spend time with those grieving. Particularly after the initial attention subsides, bring food, do errands.
- **Listen.** Grieving people need to talk about the sudden vacuum in their lives. Allow them to know that you wish to hear about their experiences. Don't force conversation, allow the grieving person to lead. Don't attempt to tell the grieving person how he/she feels. Ask (without probing), but realize you can only know what you are told.

  Avoid talking to others about trivia in the presence of the recently grieving person, even if this is done to distract the bereaved.

  Don't take away pictures, clothing, student belongings and/or desk too quickly. Acknowledge the death.
- **Send a note**. Notes can share personal memories, short and simple.
- **Give a gift**. Donate a collection of poems, a book to the library in memory of the deceased, a gift to a related charity.
- **Extend an invitation**. Consider what the person likes to do. Bereaved people often decline invitations or cancel at the last minute. Don't give up. Ask again. Don't forget the person after time has past.
- **Encourage the postponement of major decisions**. Whatever can wait should wait until after the period of intense grief.

ALTERNATE PROGRAMS

Due to the unique composition of students in some alternate programs, and the different organization and/or location of alternate education centres, districts may want to develop a separate critical incident response protocol for these programs.

Some districts have a large population of "at risk" or vulnerable students in alternate programs. Because of the nature of these students, the plan should take into consideration the need to maintain close contact between students and staff who have built trusting relationships with them. It may also be important to minimize contact with outside personnel and persons from the community. These considerations should be discussed during the development of the critical incident protocol.

STEP 1 - CONTACT THE PRINCIPAL

The alternate program staff person who first becomes aware of the critical incident contacts the principal responsible for the program, and the principal then contacts the District Critical Incidence Leader. Staff should keep a list of key telephone numbers at home and at the program site for quick reference. One staff member at each site should be the designated leader of critical incident responses.

STEP 2 - GATHERING THE FACTS

The Principal will confirm the event with appropriate personnel, including the immediate family, police, coroner, school district personnel, and/or community resource personnel.

This information will shared with the program staff, the District Critical Incident Team Leader, the designated media contact person.

STEP 3 - COMMUNICATION WITH STAFF

The alternate program teacher will inform the other staff as soon as details are available from the Principal. After consultation with the site staff, the Principal may delegate the district resource person to assist with some of the following steps.

STEP 4 - TALK WITH STUDENTS

The same general principles apply here as in a regular school, with the added caution that many students in an alternate site may be particularly vulnerable to a traumatic event.

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Step 5 - Action Plan

The alternate program staff, with the assistance of the principal and district staff can organize an action plan. The following outline is suggested as a guide.

Administrative Tasks

- Inform feeder schools and other relevant elementary and secondary schools.
- Ensure adjoining programs are informed.
- Inform community resource personnel and arrange for support as needed.
- Prepare information letters for parents and arrange distribution.
- Ensure district media person (Superintendent or designate) has information and refer all media inquiries.

Practical Tasks

- Prepare set script to use for answering telephone calls.
- Provide space for counselling or other needed functions.
- Plan response to visitors arriving at the program site.
- Hold staff meeting to review events at the end of the school day and plan for the next day.
- Keep district level staff informed and access support services and advice as needed (for example, access to counsellors or mental health workers).

Counselling Tasks

- Ensure that professional counselling in addition to support by alternate program staff is available if needed by students and staff.
- Identify and focus interventions on students most at risk.
- Ensure students have a list of emergency numbers they can use for out of school hours.
- Keep a counselling presence in the program site until after there is closure to the critical incident (for example, a funeral service).
- Ensure that students are prepared for attendance if they plan to go to the funeral.

Suicide Warning Signs and Ways to Help

Warning Signs:

Changes in behaviour
Normally active people may become withdrawn; cautious individuals may start taking unusual risks. Any significant change may be cause for concern.

Problems in school
A dramatic drop in grades, falling asleep in class, emotional outbursts or other uncharacteristic behaviour may be cause for concern.

Themes of death
A desire to end one's life may show up in the person's artwork, poetry, essays, listening to heavy metal music, or preoccupation with an occult group or activity.

A previous suicide attempt
A significant number of young people who commit suicide have attempted suicide before.

Substance abuse
Alcohol and other drug abuse appear to be significantly linked to increases risk taking and suicide attempts among young people.

Signs of depression
These may include changes in eating and sleeping habits, anxiety, restlessness, fatigue, feelings of hopelessness and guilt, and loss of interest in usual activities. Alcohol and drug abuse are common ways for people to medicate themselves from depressive feelings.

Verbal statements
Comments such as "You'd be better off without me" or "I wish I were dead" should always be taken seriously.

Giving away possessions
Someone who has decided to commit suicide may give away personal possessions: records, favourite articles of clothing, etc.

Poor coping skills
The inability to see many options for solving problems and lacking confidence in a brighter future make young people vulnerable.

Other
These may include physical complaints, frequent accidents, hyperactivity, aggressiveness, sexual promiscuity, or prolonged grief after a loss.

Ways to help:

Do

Be a good listener

Be calm, speak quietly and gently. Listen with your eyes and your ears. Look for nonverbal clues that show how the person is feeling and report what you see. For example, say "you" seem sad," then wait for a response.

Be direct

Talking openly is the only way you can find out how serious the person is about ending his or her life. Ask "have you ever felt so low that you felt that life was not worth living?"

Show that you care

Tell the person that you are always available to talk about things that may be troubling him/her. Use a warm expression and physical contact to reassure him/her that you care.

Get help

Seeking professional help is a must! Although simple depression can disappear as quickly as it came, it can develop to the point where a person may impulsively see suicide as the only way out.

Don t

Don t minimize

Avoid offering empty reassurance or dismiss the person's problems as trivial. From his perspective they matter a great deal and are making him/her unhappy.

Don t make a moral judgement

Don't act shocked or disgusted. Do not use reverse psychology. Don't tell them they have a lot to live for, argue with them, lecture or punish. If what the person tells you makes you feel angry, control those feelings.

Don t leave the person alone

If you feel there is any immediate danger, don't leave the person alone and eliminate all access to lethal weapons, drugs, and cars. The easy availability of guns or drugs increases the chances of a passing impulse ending in death.

Don t ignore the problem

Just because a person may frequently be manipulative, dramatic, or attention seeking doesn't mean they are not also suicidal.

MATERIAL FOR PARENTS
FOLLOWING A CRITICAL INCIDENT

The following six pages contain copies of the text from pamphlets developed for parents. The material is printed in a format which can be used to create a school district pamphlet. If preferred, the content of the following pamphlets can be used in the development of other materials, with appropriate references to the original sources.

The first pamphlet, for parents of younger children, is printed with the permission of School District 38 (Richmond) and has material drawn from Health and Welfare Canada's publication, *Personal Services* (Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1990).

The second, for parents of teenagers, is printed with the permission of Student Services, School District 36 (Surrey) and was adapted from the Richmond material.

The stages of grief are derived from the work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (See Resource list).

A Difficult Time

The events of recent days have, no doubt, been upsetting for you and your child. Traumatic events shake the world that we had considered safe and predictable. These events also create a high level of confusion and apprehension. Discussion in the news and on the playground often adds to the disruption.

Children exposed to a loss or a sudden violent event experience intense feelings, including anxiety and fear. These feelings are very normal responses. They fear injury, death, being separated from family loss. These fears are very real to the child and should be accepted at face value by parents. This isn't to say that these reactions won't be upsetting or confusing, but remember a wide range of reactions to a loss are normal.

We all recognize the expressions of the crying child, but we aren't always able to recognize the signs and needs of the angry child or the withdrawn child. Sometimes we don't connect certain behaviour to the tragedy. This pamphlet is intended to help you, as a parent, to understand and help your children through this difficult time.

Other sources of help

Loss and disaster wound many, even those who seem not to be touched by what occurred. There is no shame in expressing your pain as well as the pain felt by your children. There is also no shame in seeking help from people in the community. School counsellors, counselling clinics, Health Department personnel, the clergy etc. are just some of the resources available to assist you and your family.

Caring for the caregiver

Disaster and loss can have a profound effect far beyond anything this brochure can address. Those in the midst of crisis understand that it is one thing to know helpful ideas; it is quite another issue to practice them. At these times, even the simplest steps can seem almost impossible. Calming the distressed child or feeling confined by the clinging child can be emotionally draining in the extreme.

Walt Whitman said, "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person." At one level Whitman is describing the attitude needed to help people in pain but his words also point out that the wounds felt by those we love, are felt by us as well. In order to take care of yourself, be certain not to put unreasonable demands on yourself by trying to be all things to all people. Expectation and normal daily activities may need to be scaled down. Remember:

1. Grief usually lasts longer than anticipated. Most response occurs in the first days and weeks but the effects of grief are often revisited for some time.
2. Most of your children's reactions are normal responses to disaster or loss.

The information in this pamphlet is based on materials prepared by School District 38 (Richmond), School District 36 (Surrey) and Health and Welfare Canada.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

When does the hurting stop?

A parent guide
for assisting young children
through trauma and loss

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Possible reac[illegible] by children under age six

Disruption of family routines can make children irritable, angry and confused, or quiet and withdrawn. They long for things to be as they were. Some behaviours include: whining, wetting themselves, asking to be fed or dressed, not allowing parents out of their sight, terrified of crowds and a need to be continually held.

Children who cling to their parents are expressing fears of separation in a very natural way. Because their security has been threatened (trauma; loss-death, separation, a move), they are trying to prevent anything from disrupting their feeling of being safe and protected. Security and comfort are provided by attaching to special blankets, animals etc. or habits such as thumb sucking and nail biting.

How you can help:

- Understand your child's regressive behaviour is normal and is usually temporary.
- Try not to overreact. Relax. Over concern, nagging and punishment often cause undesirable behaviours to last longer.
- Acknowledge, encourage and praise appropriate and positive behaviour.
- Spend extra time with your children. Show them they are understood and loved and that you aren't upset by their regressive behaviour.
- Clinging children need to know that you will come back. Be patient. Leave when necessary but don't go without telling them where you are going and that you will return. Give lots of extra praise, love and attention.
- Keep the family together especially in the early days after a traumatic event such as disaster or loss. It is natural to want to protect your children and send them away from unpleasant situations, but this may add to their fears, not lessen them. Children need their parents or familiar adults around them as much as possible.
- In the case of disasters, including your children in the clean up helps give needed activity.
- Return to regular family routines as soon as possible. This includes re-establishment of bedtime schedules and having playmates over. Familiar routines are comforting for a child.

Possible reactions by chil[illegible] ages six to 11

At this age fears and anxieties are based on an increasing awareness of real danger. Loss of prized possessions, especially pets, seems to hold special meaning. Imaginary fears that seem unrelated to the loss may appear as well. Regressive behaviour may appear such as bed wetting, clinging, and nightmares, sometimes to a marked degree. Where the loss is associated with a disaster such as a fire, flood etc.; weather conditions (thunder, lightning, heavy winds) may trigger fears that the disaster will recur. Other reactions can include: irritability, disobedience, depression, headaches and visual or hearing problems.

How you can help:

- Take your children's fears seriously. A child's fear doesn't have to make sense. A child who is afraid is truly afraid. Don't be angry or make fun. Don't say, "It's silly to be afraid." rather say, "I can see you are afraid." or "It is a scary feeling when you think you're all alone." Being told that it is normal to feel afraid is reassuring.
- Listen to what your children tell you. Knowing their fears will help you understand the situation.
- Don't force your children to be brave or face what frightens them. Help by easing them out of the fear. The stronger the fear, the greater the need to confront it gradually and the longer it will take to overcome. Help by providing: a night light, gradually moving it away, a flashlight by the child's bed or a friend to sleep overnight.
- Explain the situation as best you can. Situations which are not understood cause the greatest fear. Information helps normalize the event.
- Provide an atmosphere in which children can talk freely about their fears. Often parents are reluctant due to the belief that this keeps painful memories alive and harms them. Children who think that their parents don't understand their fears feel ashamed, rejected, unloved, consequently, even more afraid.
- While it is important to demonstrate strength and control to your children, it will not harm them to let them know they you experience fear. Put there feelings into words such as, "It is a scary feeling when it rains/thunders etc." This encourages children to talk about their own experience.

School avoidance

Children may refuse to go to school, have behaviour problems at school and/or experience difficulty concentrating. One reason for not going to school may be a fear of separating from parents. High achieving children may be afraid of doing poorly while low performers may find concentrating more difficult.

Understanding children's nighttime fear[illegible]

Children may refuse to go to their rooms or be reluctant to sleep by themselves. When they go to bed, they may have difficulty falling asleep. Once asleep, they may awaken frightened, crying, screaming or shaking with re-experienced terror. Once awake they may insist on sleeping with their parents or have someone stay near them. They may also express fears of darkness.

Traumatic events and loss naturally increase a child's fear of separation from parents. It is normal for a child to seek the comfort of a parent's presence. Nightmares provide a way for children to work through strong emotions. The frightening creatures and events encountered are as real as daily life.

To calm your child, differentiate what is real from what is fantasy. To do this you need to hear what the nightmare was about. Listen without interruptions. Do not deny the fear by saying, "There's nothing to be afraid of." Validate the experience by saying, "That sounds like a frightening experience. I don't blame you for hiding/crying/screaming." Give reassurance that you are near. Allowing the child to sleep on a mattress in your bedroom or in another child's room on a temporary basis might help.

If a child is having increasing numbers of nightmares or is extremely upset, seek the help of a school counsellor, family doctor or public health nurse.

How you can help:

- Increased time with your children during waking hours will help them feel more secure at night.
- Providing opportunity for exercise and vigorous play helps burn off excess tension and creates needed fatigue.
- Providing a comforting bedtime routine (quiet play, telling a story, comforting toys) contributes to a sense of well being needed to reduce stress. This time also enables children to share anxieties and fears with their parents.
- If your children gets out of bed, lead them calmly back, reassuring them of your presence: "I'm here and I love you, but it's time to go to sleep now."
- If your children calls to you or cry after being put to bed, go and offer hugs of reassurance. Acknowledge their fear of separation, "It can be scary when you are by yourself." Reassure them of your presence: "We are here. We will protect you and make sure that no harm comes to you." It can be helpful to have a nightlight on and the door left open.
- If your children wake up frightened, go to them at once and provide comfort. Try not to turn on a light or talk in a loud voice. Acknowledge the fear, "You must have had a very scary dream."

A Difficult Time

The events of recent days have, no doubt, been upsetting for you and your child. Traumatic events shake the world that we had considered safe and predictable. These events also create a high level of confusion and apprehension. Discussion in the news and at the school often adds to the disruption.

The experience of a loss or a sudden violent event can produce intense anxiety and fear. These feelings are very normal. Suffering, loss and death have shattered the teenager's sense of invincibility and immortality. Teenagers often present an image of strength and other forms of 'best face forward'. Unfortunately, this results in a tendency for emotions to be buried, only to be resurrected later, sometimes in less healthy ways.

The need not to reveal weakness often causes much pain and grief to go unnoticed. These coping strategies can often be rewarded unwittingly with comments such as, "You are handling things very well." While this may appear to be the case, it is often an illusion.

This pamphlet is intended to help you, as a parent, to understand and help your child through this difficult time.

Other sources of help

Loss and disaster wound many, even those who seem not to be touched by what occurred. There is no shame in expressing your pain as well as the pain felt by your children. There is also no shame in seeking help from people in the community. School counsellors, counselling clinics, Health Department personnel, the clergy etc. are just some of the resources available to assist you and your family.

Caring for the caregiver

Disaster and loss can have a profound effect far beyond anything this pamphlet can address. Those in the midst of crisis understand that it is one thing to know helpful ideas; it is quite another issue to practice them. At these times, even the simplest steps can seem almost impossible. Calming the distressed child or feeling confined by the clinging child can be emotionally draining in the extreme.

Walt Whitman said, "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person." At one level Whitman is describing the attitude needed to help people in pain but his words also point out that the wounds felt by those we love, are felt by us as well. In order to take care of yourself, be certain not to put unreasonable demands on yourself by trying to be all things to all people. Expectation and normal daily activities may need to be scaled down. Remember:

1. Grief usually lasts longer than anticipated. Most response occurs in the first days and weeks but the effects of grief are often revisited for some time.
2. Most of your child's reactions are normal responses to disaster or loss.

The information in this pamphlet is based on materials prepared by School District 38 (Richmond), School District 36 (Surrey) and Health and Welfare Canada.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

When does the hurting stop?

A parent guide for assisting teens through trauma and loss

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Assisting [redacted]agers through loss

The loss of people we care for is very painful and confusing. We recognize pain expressed by tears, but pain evidenced by withdrawal, hopelessness and anger can be harder to detect. Sometimes we see pain and grief as short term so when certain behaviours appear, we wonder what is behind them.

Adolescents, as noted in the introduction to this pamphlet, often present an image of strength. Unfortunately, this results in a tendency for emotions to be buried, only to be resurrected later, sometimes in less healthy ways.

The need not to reveal weakness often causes much pain and grief to go unnoticed. These coping strategies can often be rewarded unwittingly with comments such as, "You are handling things very well." While this may appear to be the case, it is often an illusion.

How you can help:

While most helping response occurs in the first few weeks after a traumatic event, grief usually lasts longer than anticipated. The effects of grief are often revisited long after the event. These delayed, seemingly unrelated responses to grief can be baffling. It is important to keep this in mind when dealing with behaviour that is uncharacteristic.

- Be a listener. Most help comes from genuine concern that listens rather than seeks to give the "right" piece of advice. Communicate that grieving last longer than anyone expects although the intensity usually subsides. Certain events such as birthdays and holidays may result in a "revisitation" of grief.
- Do not avoid talking about the person or event because you feel it might reawaken the pain. Avoidance of the topic conveys a lack of caring rather than the more likely fact that you do not know what to say. Usually your teenager will want to talk, although it may not come in the fashion or the time you had planned. Follow their lead and be a listener.
- Try not to make any unnecessary changes during this time. Times of grief and loss are not the times to be making important decision. Attempt to keep the situation as normalized as possible.

Perhaps the greatest challenge you, as a parent have, is to encourage and allow the admittance and healthy expression of grief.

What to watch fo[redacted]

Trouble signs to watch for in adolescents following a loss may include:

- withdrawal and isolation
- physical complaints (headache, stomach pain)
- emotional concerns (depression, sadness, tension, suicidal thoughts, confusion)
- anti-social behaviour (stealing, acting out, aggression, substance abuse)
- school problems (avoidance, disruptive behaviour, academic failures)

Most of these are temporary. Teenagers who appear to be withdrawn and who isolate themselves from family and friends may be experiencing emotional difficulties. The need to appear competent may work against their reaching out to others for assistance.Most grief reactions are normal responses to disaster or loss, however it is imperative that suicidal thinking be treated seriously and that help is sought.

Loss and disaster can thrust teenagers into an adult role. Regardless whether these results occur, it is important that they give themselves permission to grieve.

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Understanding the grief pro[redacted]s

While the following stages commonly occur in he grief experience, it is important to remember that grief does not follow a defined pattern. These stages may be experienced repeatedly, in differing sequence and with differing intensity.

- **Denial** is a shock absorber which temporarily reduces the full impact of the crisis, such as a person's unwillingness to talk abut the loss. In the early stages denial isn't something that is wrong, however problems can occur if it continues. Give permission to feel the feeling.
- **Anger/guilt** often occur due to a person's feeling of powerlessness over the loss. Questions include: How could he/she do this to me? Why would God allow it? How could this happen to someone at our school? Blaming others can also be a common response. It is important to admit the anger, identify the real source of the anger, understand that is okay to be angry. Seek healthy ways to express it such as strenuous physical activity, keeping a journal, sketching or talking with people you trust.
- **Sorrow/depression** are evidenced by some or all of: crying, isolation, silence, a loss of energy, and an inability to sleep. Allow and encourage expressions of grief. Emphasize that crying is not a sign of weakness, rather is the facing and acknowledgment of loss. Recording thoughts in a journal can also be very healing. Activity is helpful for depression, although sometimes depression is so deep that even activity seems too difficult. Referral to the family physician is encouraged for depression that persists.
- **Bargaining** is a means of trying to regain control or to make sense of what has occurred. This often takes the form of a promise to God that things will change if only He does something. The question "Why?" is very naturally asked through all stages but is perhaps most prevalent in the anger and the bargaining phase. The real problem cannot be faced until the "why" is abandoned and the person looks as "who, when, where and how" things happened. The reality of what has happened cannot be changed.
- **Acceptance and admission** of our powerlessness in the situation is not quickly or easily reached. Having grieved we can move on with life. Emphasize that acceptance is not a matter of forgetting the person or minimizing the pain. In fact, it is a full acceptance that the loss was real, significant and painful.

The Grief Process

Grief is a natural and normal process. It is the work we must do to come to terms with loss. Grief is not a single emotion, but rather it is a constellation of feelings which can be expressed through a variety of behaviours and thoughts. Because there are many ways to express grief, there are many ways to resolve grief. It should be remembered, then, that children who are grieving may show a variety of physiological symptoms and psychological and behavioural responses.

Grief is the healthiest way to accept a loss and put it into perspective. It helps us to face the reality of loss, to recover, and to grow through the experience. The expression of grief may differ with each individual, yet follow a broad common framework. It is important to understand the process of grief.

No matter what type of loss is experienced, the same process is generally gone through each time, although the length and intensity of the experience will differ. The stages of grief are not necessarily in a particular order. An individual may flow back and forth between stages. There is no set time for an individual to spend in each stage. To reach a level of acceptance may take months or years.

Death & Grieving

A Parent Guide to Understanding Trauma and Loss

The information in this pamphlet is based on materials prepared by School District 38 (Richmond), School District 36 (Surrey) and Health and Welfare Canada.

British Columbia

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Death and Grieving

Tell children about death of a loved one. Sometimes parents are so preoccupied with their own grief that they fail to consider their children's own grief. This is particularly true when children do not demonstrate what we often consider the obvious signs of grief. Others want to protect children from pain and sadness. These motives are understandable but providing children with simple, honest, age appropriate information, gives them the right to grieve. Crying and other forms of grief are healing and are not a symptom to be controlled. Children should be encouraged to ask questions and respond as they feel. It is important to remember that the absence of tears does not mean they do not feel grief. Communicate that grief lasts far longer than anyone expects although the intensity usually subsides. Certain events such as birthdays and holidays may result in a 'revisitation' of grief.

- Include them in the funeral rituals. In a age appropriate manner explain the events surrounding the funeral. Avoid euphemisms (sleeping, passed away) rather use the words death/dead.
- Provide family reassurance and support. When a parent dies, most children are fearful about what might happen to them should the remaining parent die. They may need repeated gentle assurance that although their parent or relative has died and will not return. It is essential that all efforts be made to prevent any further breakup of the family after bereavement.
- Children often express their concerns through play but be available if the play leads to discussion. Get down to the children's level (play on the floor if necessary) and see the world through their eyes.

The Stages of Grief

While the following commonly occur in the grief experience, it is important to remember that grief does not follow a defined pattern. These stages may be experienced repeatedly, in different sequence and with differing intensity.

Denial

Denial tends to be a shock absorber which temporally reduces the full impact of the crisis. This might involve a person's unwillingness to talk about the loss. Young children do not understand death and its finality. In the early stages denial isn't something that is wrong, needing correction, however problems can occur if it continues. Give permission to feel the feeling.

Anger/Guilt

Anger or guilt often occur due to a person's feeling of powerlessness over losing something or someone. Conscious or unconscious questions include: How could he/she do this to me? Why would God allow it? How could the doctors be so incompetent? Blaming others can also be a common response. It is important to admit the anger, identify the real source of the anger, understand that it is okay to be angry and then seek healthy ways to express it. This might include strenuous physical activity, journaling, drawing, playing with sand, water or play dough etc. Children may feel that they somehow created the situation. "If only I had done/hadn't done, then...". Reassure that death and loss are not the child's fault.

Sorrow/Depression

Sorrow and depression are the most recognizable stages in the grief process. Marked by some or all of : crying, isolation, silence, a loss of energy, and an inability to sleep. Allow and encourage expressions of grief. Boys may particularly need permission to cry. Emphasize that crying is not a sign of weakness rather it can be a sign of strength. It is the facing and acknowledgment of loss; e.g. "It's okay to cry now. You've got a lot to cry about, so go ahead." Activity is helpful for depression although sometimes depression is so deep that even activity seems too difficult. Referral to the family physician is encouraged for this type of depression and depression that persists.

Bargaining

Bargaining is a means of trying to regain control or to make sense of what has occurred. This often takes the form of a promise to God that things will change if only He does something. The question "Why?" is very naturally asked through all stages but is perhaps most prevalent in the anger and the bargaining phase. Unfortunately, in almost every situation the "why's" have no satisfying answer. The real problem cannot be faced until the "why" is abandoned and the person looks at "who, when, where and how" things happened. The reality of what has happened cannot be changed.

Acceptance/Admission

Acceptance and admission of our powerlessness in the situation is not quickly or easily reached. Having grieved, we can move on with life. Emphasize that acceptance in not a matter of forgetting, it is a full acceptance that the loss was real, significant and painful.

To comfort a grieving child:

- **Be yourself**. Show your natural concern and sorrow in your own way and own words.
- **Be there**. Spend time with the child walking, reading, talking. Spend some time with the child away from the group.
- **Listen**. Be sure to have good eye contact. Use simple, direct words. Let the child be mad or express other feelings.
- **Explain things**. Give information about what's going to happen. Keep promises made. Be as predictable as possible.
- **Comfort the child**. Don't assume that a seemingly calm child is not sorrowing. If you can, be a friend to whom feelings can be confided and with whom tears can be shed.

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Resources

Health Canada, Emergency Service Division (1990). *Personal Services: Psychosocial Planning for Disasters;* Ministry of Supply and Services (Canada).

Jewett, C. L., (1982). *Helping children cope with separation and loss;* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Common Press.

Justice Institute of British Columbia, *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing;* (Video and Support Materials), New Westminster, BC.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth (1970). *On Death and Dying;* New York: MacMillan Publishing

Mitchell, Jeffrey T. (1988). Development and Functions of a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team. *Journal of Emergency Medical Services,* December.

Mitchell, Jeffrey T. (1983). When Disaster Strikes... The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Process. *Journal of Emergency Medical Services;* January.

Obiakor, F., Mehring, T.A., & Schwenn, J.O. (1997). *Disruption, Disaster, and Death: Helping Students Deal with Crises;* Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Rando, Therese A., (1984). *Grief, Dying, and Death: Clinical Interventions for Caregivers;* Champaign, Ill.: Research Press.

Suicide Information and Education Centre (1990). *Youth Suicide Awareness Presenters Handbook;* Calgary, AB: Canadian Mental Health Association.

Watson, Robert S. et al. (1990). *Containing Crisis: A Guide to Managing School Emergencies;* Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.

Worden, J.W. (1996). *Children and grief: When a parent dies;* New York: Guilford Press.

Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia, *Coping with Critical Incident Stress at Work;* (pamphlet). Phone: 1-800-661-2112

Recommended Resources for Students

There are many excellent resources that can be used to help children and youth deal with death and trauma. Of these, the following books related to critical incidents have been evaluated by the Ministry of Education for inclusion in recommended resource portions of curriculum documents.

Carrick, Carol (1976). *The Accident;* New York: The Seabury Press.

Klagsburn, Francine (1976). *Too Young To Die;* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co.

Krementz, Jill (1981). *How It Feels When A Parent Dies;* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

LeShan, Eda (1976). *Learning To Say Good-bye When A Parent Dies;* New York: MacMillan Publishing Co. Inc.

Somon, Norma (1986). *The Saddest Time;* Niles, IL.: A. Whitman.

Viorst, Judith (1971).*The Tenth Good Thing About Barney;* New York: Macmillan Child Group.

How to improve this resource guide

We hope this Resource Guide helps your school to plan for responding to critical incidents. Since the users of any manual are often the ones best able to identify its strengths and weaknesses, let us know how this document can be improved. If you have any suggestions and comments, please complete a copy of this page and send it to the Special Programs Branch.

How do you rate **Critical Incidents: A Resource Guide for Schools**?

	Yes	No	If No, please explain:
1. Useful?	❑	❑	_____
			_____
2. Easy to understand?	❑	❑	_____
			_____
3. Well Organized?	❑	❑	_____
			_____
4. Complete?	❑	❑	_____
			_____

Other Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

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